

# Screen

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*Shree 420/Mr 420* (Raj Kapoor, 1955).

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# From documentary to drama: capturing Aileen Wuornos

TANYA HORECK

Nick Broomfield's and Joan Churchill's documentary *Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer* (UK/USA, 2003) captures the last thoughts and moments of death row inmate Aileen Wuornos, the woman who was convicted of murdering seven men between 1989 and 1990 and who was sensationally referred to in the media as 'America's first female serial killer'.<sup>1</sup> In her final interview before execution, the camera zooms in for an extreme closeup as an exhausted and angry Wuornos delivers a disturbing rant: 'You sabotaged my ass, society. And the cops. And the system. A raped woman got executed and was used for books and movies and shit'. The next day, 9 October 2002, she was executed.

The promotional material for *Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer* states that it provides 'a disturbing and humane insight into the mind of a deeply paranoid yet sympathetic person'.<sup>2</sup> This, too, is the apparent objective of first-time director Patty Jenkins's much-hyped independent feature film *Monster* (USA/Germany, 2003). Released in cinemas a few months after Broomfield's and Churchill's documentary, the film, which features glamorous Hollywood actress Charlize Theron in the role of Wuornos, announces that it is 'based on a true story'. In an attempt to humanize the 'monster' of the media reports, Jenkins focuses on a fictionalized version of the real-life relationship between Wuornos and her lover Tyria Moore.<sup>3</sup> *Monster* is marketed as a film 'that burrows deep beneath the tabloid-sized headline stories to the abusive neglect, doomed romance and lost opportunities that plagued Aileen's life'.<sup>4</sup>

The extent to which the documentary and the feature film are packaged together is notable. *Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer* is presented as 'the true story of the woman branded *Monster*'. The DVD box set of

1 Wuornos argued that it was not the number of men she killed that was important, but 'the principle', the fact that on each occasion she was defending herself. See Lynda Hart, *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1994), p. 136, for arguments about why Wuornos does not fit the profile of a serial killer.

2 Blurb included on the back of the DVD of *Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer* and *Aileen Wuornos: the Selling of a Serial Killer*, distributed by Optimum Releasing.

3 Promotional synopsis of the film found on <http://www.monsterfilm.com>.

4 Blurb found on back of the DVD for *Monster*, distributed by Metrodome.

*Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer* and the earlier Broomfield documentary, *Aileen Wuornos: the Selling of a Serial Killer* (1992), includes the theatrical trailer for *Monster*. Information on the DVD also announces that ‘both films were used by Charlize Theron as the basis of her Oscar-winning performance as Aileen in *Monster*’. Another commercial tie-in has appeared in the form of a DVD box set that brings together *Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer* and *Monster*. In Spring 2005, Channel 4’s Film4 screened them as a double bill, showing first *Monster* (‘worth watching for the physical transformation alone – the preposterously beautiful Theron assumes an uncanny likeness of Wuornos’), then *Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer* (‘For a closer look at the real Ms. Wuornos, should anyone who watches this still desire one’).<sup>5</sup> The cross-promotion between the documentary and the drama is thus overt.

One of the results of this corporate synergy is that spectators are invited to watch and interpret the documentary and the drama together. As seen above, the documentary advertises itself as the true story not merely of Aileen Wuornos but of the Aileen Wuornos played by Charlize Theron in *Monster*. The incestuous intermingling between these two films is such that *Rolling Stone* reviewer Peter Travers suggests that ‘Aileen makes a better Aileen than Theron’.<sup>6</sup> Odd though it sounds, Travers’s point is that the real Wuornos is far more compelling than the fictionalized character played by Theron, a view shared by other reviewers such as *The Guardian*’s John Patterson, who notes that ‘no acting can compete with such reality’.<sup>7</sup> He further contends that ‘Broomfield’s and Churchill’s search for truth inevitably trumps Jenkins’s fictionalization’. In contrast, David Denby of *The New Yorker* asserts that it takes a good actress in a good fictional piece to make us really care about the damaged Wuornos. As Denby notes: ‘This is one instance in which art clearly trumps documentary “truth”. The real Wuornos is too will-driven to show us more than one side of herself. In the end, you need a sane persona and an artist to bring out the humanity in a crazy person’.<sup>8</sup>

The debate about whether the documentary or the drama has the most to offer is staged as a contest between reality and fiction. A close examination of this debate reveals the extent to which the categories of reality and fiction are in fact interwoven, with interpretation of both films reliant not only on how they relate to actuality but also how they relate to each other. I am not interested in deciding which film offers us the ‘best’ depiction of Wuornos and her story, rather I want to consider how the two films trade in images of her as a monstrous other, and how that trade is revealing about the perceived status of and relationships between documentary and dramatizations of real life, and the kind of work these different forms of fact-based films are seen to perform in public culture. It is important, I argue, for the documentary and dramatic versions of the Wuornos story to be considered each in the context of the other, given their commingling and close ties.

<sup>5</sup> See *The Guide* section of *The Guardian*, 30 April 2005, p. 65.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Travers, ‘Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer’. URL: [http://www.rollingstone.com/reviews/movie/\\_/id/5947795/md=1112614407687&has](http://www.rollingstone.com/reviews/movie/_/id/5947795/md=1112614407687&has) [accessed 20 April 2005].

<sup>7</sup> John Patterson, ‘The ugly chair’, *The Guardian*, 23 January 2004.

<sup>8</sup> David Denby, in Decca Aitkenhead, ‘The gift of a killer’, *The Guardian*, 27 March 2004.

9 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 76.

10 Ibid., p. 77.

11 See Paul Ward's interesting discussion of the relationship between *Life and Death*, *Monster* and the made-for-television movie *Overkill*, in *Documentary: the Margins of Reality* (New York, NY and London: Wallflower Press, 2005), pp. 40–8.

12 Blake Morrison, 'Who needs fantasy? How the documentary came back to life', *The Guardian*, 5 March 2004, pp. 4–6.

13 Nick Broomfield, in Kevin MacDonald and Mark Cousins (eds), *Imagining Reality: the Faber Book of Documentary* (Boston, MA and London: Faber & Faber, 1996), pp. 364–5.

In her book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag states that 'photographs that everyone recognizes are now a constituent part of what a society chooses to think about, or declares that it has chosen to think about'.<sup>9</sup> She further argues that 'collective memory is a stipulating: that *this* is important, and this is the story about what happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds. Ideologies create substantiating archives of images, representative images'.<sup>10</sup> From documentary to drama and back again, the story of Aileen Wuornos is now inseparably intertwined with the representative images found in these official filmic depictions of reality.<sup>11</sup> Through exploring the filmic evolution of her story from documentary to drama, I want to question some of the ideological uses underlying the construction of her public image in true-crime representations that lay claim to authenticity.

*Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer* is a documentary investigation into the weeks leading up to the execution by lethal injection of Aileen Wuornos. It can be situated in terms of a rise in the popularity of documentary filmmaking, exemplified by the massive box-office success of Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* (2002) and *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004). In his recent exploration of what might lie behind this 'public craving for authenticity', Blake Morrison argues that documentaries 'give us what Hollywood won't – fantastic stories'.<sup>12</sup> It is a perspective that runs through reviews that explicitly compare *Life and Death* with Hollywood films.

Broomfield is a British documentary filmmaker who draws on elements of the 'traditional observational style' but whose work is shaped by 'personal interventions' into the stories and the people he is documenting.<sup>13</sup> Although *Life and Death* is codirected with Churchill, Broomfield's former partner, it is significant that she remains – with one notable exception to be discussed later – behind the scenes, operating the camera. As with his other films, Broomfield and his onscreen performance as documentary filmmaker take centre stage. A typical Broomfield film shows him making phone calls to prospective interviewees and driving in his car to track down subjects. Although his documentaries have a linear structure in so far as they are constructed around the objective of obtaining the interview, there is often a strong sense of repetition and circularity as Broomfield, in Columbo-like fashion, returns to his interviewees to clarify certain points, or to see whether he can press them to reveal more.

The cinematic trailer for *Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer* contains clues as to how the film positions the spectator in relation to its subject matter. After foregrounding the film's status as a piece by an auteur, 'A new film by Nick Broomfield', the trailer begins by focusing on a black and white photograph of a smiling little blonde girl. We then hear Broomfield's voice (but do not see him): 'Aileen, let me ask you one question: do you think if you hadn't had to leave your home and sleep in the cars it would have worked out differently?' The screen fades to black

and we are given an extreme closeup of the adult Aileen, looking manic and worn-down, as she responds:

If I could do my life all over again . . . and I came from a family that was supportive, we didn't have split sister/half sister and brother stuff and all of that, [if] it was all true blood, real blood and everything was financially stable and everybody was really tight I would have become more than likely an outstanding citizen of America who would have either been an archaeologist, a police officer, a fire department gal or an undercover worker for DEA or a . . . did I say archaeology? Or a missionary.

Screen fades back to black, a soundtrack begins playing and a caption reads: 'Aileen Wuornos was executed for the murder of seven men on October 9, 2002. This is her story.'

Situating his documentary in the tradition of a cinema of social concern, Broomfield has said that *Life and Death* is an attempt to bring public attention to the injustice of the death penalty and the inhumanity of the state in putting a mentally disturbed individual to death.<sup>14</sup>

Whatever the audience may or may not know about her crimes before seeing the film, what comes across is the extent of Wuornos's mental disturbance. The extreme closeups of Wuornos, in the trailer as well as in the documentary itself, are presented as visual verification of this disturbance. Mary Ann Doane notes that 'the scale of the close-up transforms the face into an instance of the gigantic, the monstrous, it overwhelms'.<sup>15</sup> The closeups of Wuornos contribute to her monstrosity and demonstrate the degree of her anguish; they also present her face as a 'text' to be read.<sup>16</sup> There is a tension in Broomfield's documentary between his desire to explore the psychical and social determinants of the crimes of his subject and his tendency to rely upon the visual, in the form of closeup images of Wuornos. Because Wuornos will not share details of the crimes she committed with Broomfield, or offer stories of her own history of victimization, her damaged visage and the obvious pain and anger in her voice are offered to us by Broomfield as indicators of traumatic experience.

Much of what makes Broomfield's *Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer* so luridly captivating is the awareness that we are watching a woman condemned to death; an already dead woman who is going to die. As Roland Barthes notes of the photograph of Lewis Payne, who was hanged by state execution for the attempted assassination in 1865 of the Secretary of State, W.H. Seward, the emotional pull of the image comes from the knowledge that '*he is dead and he is going to die*'.<sup>17</sup> For Barthes, this uneasy knowledge comes with all photos and is indicative of the intimate relationship that photography has with death. Although its fundamental aim is to 'preserve life', the photograph ultimately 'produces Death': '*Life/Death*: the paradigm is reduced to a simple click, the one separating the initial pose from the final print'.<sup>18</sup> As if to emphasize this very point, *Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer*

14 See Nick Broomfield's discussion of the documentary in Jason Wood, *Nick Broomfield: Documenting Icons* (London: Faber & Faber), pp. 211–34.

15 Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1991), p. 47.

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 47–8.

17 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 95.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 92.

19 Broomfield's first documentary on Wuornos explores the attempts made by the unscrupulous, including her lawyer and her adoptive mother, to profit from the story of her crimes.

20 Karen Beckman, 'Dead woman glowing: Karla Faye Tucker and the aesthetics of death row photography', *Camera Obscura*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2004), p. 11.

21 Owen Gleiberman, 'Serial killer'. URL: [http://www.ew.com/ew/article/review/movie/0,6115,576609\\_1\\_0\\_00.html](http://www.ew.com/ew/article/review/movie/0,6115,576609_1_0_00.html) [accessed 20 April 2005].

begins by showing us the childhood black and white photograph of a smiling Wuornos, the same one used to open the trailer. This image of Wuornos as a child signals that the documentary will attempt to tell us a life story (the image of the smiling blonde child is an emblem of childhood innocence); it also points to the status of the documentary as a memorial to Wuornos who will be dead by the end of filming and who is thus dead when we view the documentary. The documentary is presented as a gesture of reparation and redemption, an attempt to rework and rethink aspects of the story not considered in Broomfield's first documentary on Wuornos, *The Selling of a Serial Killer*.<sup>19</sup> Broomfield's voiceover tells us that in this second documentary, he will explore Wuornos's childhood in Troy, Michigan, in the hopes of 'finding out more'.

The film's action begins with a point-of-view shot from behind the windscreen of a car as it drives deep into the woods. A creepy soundtrack begins to play as Broomfield's voiceover announces: 'It was here, in these woods off Florida's I-75, that in the space of one year the police found the bodies of seven men'. Broomfield includes a mug shot of Wuornos with the following voiceover: 'On January ninth, 1991, Aileen Carol Wuornos was arrested in Daytona Beach Florida. She worked as a hitchhiking hooker.'

Footage of the original video of her police confession is followed by two freeze-frame shots of Wuornos in her prison attire. The first image, which features prominently in the film's promotion, shows Wuornos in her orange prison jumpsuit, her eyes closed, her mouth turned down, with handcuffs on her wrists. Her head is thrust back and her arms are stretched back under her hair, with the handcuffs pulled taut across her neck. Her elbows are thrust towards us. This is an image of Wuornos attempting to flip her hair back, a gesture we see her performing countless times throughout Broomfield's documentary. Despite the innocuous nature of the movement, Wuornos looks defiant and intimidating. Her skin is sallow and dull, and dark shadows play across the image. It looks as if she is trying to strangle or choke herself. As Karen Beckman notes more generally of death row photography, it 'eerily doubles the death row prisoner's uncertain condition of waiting, of being suspended between life and death'.<sup>20</sup> The second image captures Wuornos with her mouth open as she yawns. She is rubbing her eyes, which, as a consequence, appear distorted. She looks grotesque, even deformed. The freakish effect of the image is exploited by a review of *Life and Death* in *Entertainment Weekly*, which reproduces it with the following caption: 'SCARY MOVIE: Documentary "Aileen" offers a new look at the real-world monster'.<sup>21</sup> These images, while only shown momentarily in *Life and Death*, are significant because they constitute the visual iconography of Wuornos and are frequently reproduced in reviews of the film.

The images of Wuornos are related to a long history of visual classification and documentation of criminals, but they are also

Cover for the DVD set of Nick Broomfield's *Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer* and *Aileen Wuornos: the Selling of a Serial Killer*, distributed by Optimum Releasing.

THE TRUE STORY OF THE WOMAN BRANDED MONSTER

# AILEEN

LIFE AND DEATH OF A SERIAL KILLER and AILEEN WUORNOS: THE SELLING OF A SERIAL KILLER  
TWO FILMS BY NICK BROOMFIELD



startlingly reminiscent of the photographs taken by the famous French doctor and hypnotist Jean-Martin Charcot, who in late nineteenth century France ran a clinic for hysterical women. Charcot, who was interested in the visual manifestation of mental illness, compiled thousands of photos of these women, described as the 'dregs of society'.<sup>22</sup> The images show closeups of the women in various contorted poses – examples include a photo of a woman with her tongue hanging out of her mouth. These images are arresting but problematic in their 'obliteration of privacy that casts the hysteric in the role of grotesque'.<sup>23</sup> Such an intimate surveillance of the female face and body, as Vicky Lebeau notes, is also part of cinema's representation of women as objects of display.<sup>24</sup> Like Charcot's images of hysterics, Broomfield's visual presentation of

<sup>22</sup> Ilsa Veith, in Vicky Lebeau (ed.), *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: the Play of Shadows* (New York, NY and London: Wallflower Press, 2001), p. 14.

<sup>23</sup> Lebeau, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, p. 18.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.



25 Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 80.

26 Broomfield, in Wood, *Nick Broomfield*, p. 232.

27 Thomas Doherty suggests that this impulse continues to the end of the film, when, after the credits, 'one half expects the actress to appear, Scooby-Doo-like, and rip off the mask to expose the babe beneath the prosthetics'. See Doherty, 'Aileen Wuornos superstar', *Cineaste*, vol. 29, no. 3 (2004), p. 4.

28 Gleiberman, 'Serial killer'.

29 Rob Mackie, 'Monster', *The Guardian*, 30 July 2004.

30 Roger Ebert, 'Monster: Theron makes ordinary movie extraordinary'. URL: <http://www.rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=20040330/REVIEWS/403> [accessed 5 April 2005].

Wuornos is an attempt at classification, which often puts her 'in the role of grotesque'. As the freeze-frame images are being shown to us, Broomfield's voiceover starts: 'The idea of a woman killing men – a man-hating lesbian prostitute who tarnished the reputations of all her victims – brought Aileen Wuornos a special kind of hatred'. Though Broomfield is reporting on how the press perceived Wuornos, and referring to the construction of her by the media as a 'man-hating lesbian', the deadpan reportage underscores the visual images of her as a freak.

Freaks, as Mary Russo notes, 'are, by definition, apart, as beings to be viewed. In the traditional sideshow, they are often caged, and most often they are silent while a barker narrates their exotic lives'.<sup>25</sup> Broomfield's starring role in *Life and Death*, along with his first-person voiceover, can produce that barker-like effect. He narrates details of her indubitably strange and tragic life, while images of Wuornos, handcuffed or shackled, are presented to us on screen. There are many images in the documentary of Wuornos raging against the world, shouting to reporters as she is bundled into cars, overlaid by Broomfield's running commentary and narration. These documentary images play a pivotal role in the reception of *Monster*. Broomfield believes that his films 'authenticate[d] [Charlize Theron's] performance' and it is to a discussion of debates surrounding the authenticity of that performance that I now want to turn.<sup>26</sup>

After a short prologue at the beginning of *Monster*, we are provided with a closeup of the fictionalized character of Wuornos. As her face fills the screen, she looks up at the audience. It is an important moment because the film introduces us to the downtrodden woman for whom we are to feel sympathy; and because the moment foregrounds what emerged as the central issue in popular discussions of the fiction film: the question of performance. For many reviewers, the challenge is to find the actress behind the fictional 'monster'.<sup>27</sup> The urge is to look for the beauty in the ugliness, the so-called 'truth' behind filmic appearances.

Reviewers of *Monster* focus their discussion of the film almost exclusively on what has been described as 'one of the most startling transformations in cinematic history'.<sup>28</sup> The blonde, blue-eyed Charlize Theron went from 'chic model-turned-actress to desperate-hooker-turned serial killer' by gaining thirty pounds, undergoing an intensive makeup job and wearing prosthetic teeth and brown contact lenses.<sup>29</sup> At the 2004 Oscar ceremony, these efforts bore fruit when she won the Academy Award for Best Actress. Critics, however, are strongly divided over her performance. On the one hand, there is Roger Ebert's hyperbolic declaration that it 'is one of the greatest performances in the history of cinema'.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, there is the cynicism of Laura Sinagra from the *Village Voice* who describes it as 'an Oscar-angling performance'. In a review titled 'The Butcher Girl: white trash + lesbian + prostitute + serial killer = Oscar?', Sinagra wryly notes that: 'If you're willing to glug a few hundred cans of Ensure, wear prosthetic teeth, conjure terminal impairment/homosexuality, and dredge up an



31 Laura Sinagra, 'The Butcher Girl: white trash+lesbian+prostitute+serial killer=Oscar?', URL: [http://www.villagevoice.com/generic/show\\_print.php?id=49687&page=sinagra&issue](http://www.villagevoice.com/generic/show_print.php?id=49687&page=sinagra&issue) [accessed 4 April 2005].

32 Richard Dyer, in Beckman, 'Dead woman glowing', p.6.

33 Stephanie Zacharek, 'Monster'. URL: <http://www.salon.com/ent/movies/review/2003/12/25/monster/print.html> [accessed 4 April 2005].

34 Jenny McCartney, 'Terrified and terrifying: cinema', *Sunday Telegraph*, 4 April 2004.

35 Liam Lacey, 'Monster', *The Globe and Mail*, 16 January 2004.

36 David Rooney, 'Monster', URL: <http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=awardcentral2004&content=jump&nav=re> [accessed 5 April 2005].

37 bell hooks, 'The oppositional gaze: black female spectators', in Amelia Jones (ed.), *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2003), p. 97.

38 Annalee Newitz, 'White savagery and humiliation, or a new racial consciousness in the media', in Annalee Newitz and Matt Wray (eds), *White Trash: Race and Class in America* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1997), p. 134.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Beckman, 'Dead woman glowing', p. 11.

OxyContin-slurred drawl that would scare the banjo off the inbred *Deliverance* boy, importance can be yours'.<sup>31</sup>

I agree there is something disquieting about this beauty-to-beast transformation, which points more generally to the gender, class and race politics of representations of Wuornos. What is particularly interesting to explore in this regard is how Theron's offscreen performance as a 'star' feeds into interpretations of her performance as Wuornos. Theron, who appears at awards events dressed in the style of classical Hollywood cinema and who is often likened to actresses of the Golden Age of the 1930s, is in the mould of what Richard Dyer calls the 'angelically glowing white woman'.<sup>32</sup> Reviews invariably describe Theron as a 'dazzling blonde movie star'.<sup>33</sup> She is described as 'svelte and luminous',<sup>34</sup> a 'silky golden South African beauty'.<sup>35</sup> The shocking disappearance of this beauty and its transformation into abject 'ugliness' are the subject of great media fascination. It is a 'performance', writes David Rooney of *Variety*, 'that erases the actress's creamy-skinned softness and classic beauty in a radical transformation rendering her virtually unrecognisable'.<sup>36</sup>

The focus on Theron's physical transformation repeatedly returns to the fact of her whiteness; the fetishization of her 'creamy' white skin points to what bell hooks has described as 'the obsession to have white women film stars be ultra white'.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the attention paid to the blonde beauty of Theron has the effect of underlining the racialized 'white trash' otherness of 'hitchhiking prostitute' Wuornos. As Annalee Newitz argues, 'whiteness emerges as a distinct and visible racial identity when it can be identified as somehow primitive or inhuman'.<sup>38</sup> Referring to discussions of the hillbilly in Hollywood film, Newitz notes that the 'hillbilly figure designates a white who is racially visible not just because he is poor, but also because he is sometimes monstrously so'.<sup>39</sup> Wuornos's poverty and homelessness in both *Life and Death* and *Monster* are presented as connected to her monstrosity. Of further significance for a reading of visual depictions of Wuornos is Newitz's argument that 'when middle-class whites encounter lower-class whites, we find that often their class differences are represented as the difference between civilized folks and primitive ones. Lower-class whites get racialized, and demeaned, because they fit into the primitive/civilized binary as primitives'.<sup>40</sup> Wuornos's class difference, in other words, is racialized and her much reported ugliness further contributes to her racial visibility as 'white trash'. Against Theron's movie-star luminosity, we have the documentary images of Wuornos in handcuffs and an orange prison jumpsuit, which set her apart as one of the 'masculine, insufficiently white women on death row' who are perceived by dominant culture as 'born both to kill and be killed'.<sup>41</sup> In order to mimic the 'insufficient whiteness' of Wuornos, with her worn and darkened skin, Theron must make herself up in a manner that calls to mind a tradition of actors wearing blackface.

42 Patty Jenkins, in Aitkenhead, 'The gift of a killer'.

43 Jonathan Romney, 'Dying is an art. And she does it very well: *Monster*', *The Independent*, 4 April 2004, p. 18.

44 Beckman, 'Dead woman glowing', p. 16.

45 Ibid., p. 9.

46 There is a recent history in Hollywood of beautiful actresses 'deglamorizing' themselves for roles; for example, Cameron Diaz in *Being John Malkovich* (Spike Jonze, 1999) and Nicole Kidman in *The Hours* (Stephen Daldry, 2002). In recent years, several Hollywood actresses have won Best Actress Oscars for their portrayals of poor white women who are victims of violence. In addition to Hilary Swank's performance in *Boys Don't Cry*, other prominent examples include Jodie Foster in *The Accused* (Jonathan Kaplan, 1989), and Swank again for *Million-Dollar Baby* (Clint Eastwood, 2005). I do not wish simply to conflate these individual films, but it is important to consider what kind of public fantasies are being woven around the figure of the poor white woman in contemporary popular cinema.

47 'Charlize Theron profile'. URL: <http://www.hellomagazine.com/profiles/charlizetheron/> [accessed 7 April 2005].

48 B. Ruby Rich makes a similar point in her discussion of Hilary Swank's Academy Award winning-performance as a transgender individual in *Boys Don't Cry*. As Rich suggests, the difficult questions explored in the film about gender and identity are somewhat undermined when, at the Academy Awards, 'the boyish Brandon transmutes back again into sexy babe as Swank shows up in form-hugging dress, batting her eyes and thanking her husband. The good news? That was all acting. The bad news? The same.' See Rich, 'Queer and present danger', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 10, no. 3 (2000), p. 25.

Jenkins's retort to those who criticize her decision to cast a beautiful actress in *Monster* is that there simply are not women who look like Aileen Wuornos wandering around Hollywood casting agencies. 'Hollywood is driven by beautiful faces. Always has been,' she declares.<sup>42</sup> Some critics agree with this common-sense view of the casting decision and suggest it is not fair to criticize Theron's performance on the grounds of her beauty. 'Well, it's not Theron's fault that she doesn't look as rough as Wuornos', claims Jonathan Romney.<sup>43</sup> It is possible, in fact, to take a different tack and argue that Theron's beauty is what helps to make the story of Wuornos palatable for a wide, mainstream audience. In her promotional work for the film, Theron earnestly explains her interest in the role and states why she believes *Monster* to be a worthwhile project, helping potential (middle-class) viewers of the film to understand the impoverished and deeply troubled nature of Wuornos's life.

In her analysis of photographs of women on death row, Beckman argues that there are problems with the idea that beauty brings certain ethical issues to the fore and that it 'invites us to reflect on other "less beautiful" faces'.<sup>44</sup> The 'media's care about people on death row is intimately connected to an individual's race and gender', she explains, with the most concern and attention directed towards those who conform to societal ideals of white female beauty.<sup>45</sup> Following Beckman, I would argue for the importance of interrogating some of the class and racial implications at work in discussions of Theron's beauty. Wherever one happens to stand on the debate about the politics of Hollywood actresses 'going ugly',<sup>46</sup> it is undeniable that the extratextual discussions of Theron's beauty are central to perceptions and interpretations of *Monster*.

If the beautiful Hollywood actress disappears into the figure of Aileen Wuornos, there is a sense, too, in which Aileen Wuornos disappears into the figure of the beautiful Hollywood actress. Not only did Theron make the dramatic physical transformation of which Hollywood is so fond, she had her own remarkable story of emotional transformation to accompany it. Around the time of *Monster*'s release, it emerged that Theron, who grew up on a farm in South Africa, had a violent childhood that culminated in her mother shooting and killing her father in self-defence when Theron, a witness to the event, was fifteen. Theron and her mother (who was never charged for the killing, which was called justifiable homicide) then moved to the USA and struggled to make the shift from rags to riches. As a profile of Theron in *Hello!* magazine narrativizes it: 'The road has not always been a smooth one . . . and the actress has had to overcome trauma and tragedy before finding happiness'.<sup>47</sup> I would suggest that the news of Theron's violent past functions as an alternative story of female violence, one with a much more appealing ending for Hollywood than that of the Wuornos story: at the Oscar ceremony, the glamorous Theron, back to her 'svelte and luminous' self, arrived with her mother and her handsome fiancé, the actor Stuart Townsend.<sup>48</sup> In an

49 Broomfield, in Steve Rose, 'I thought I was really watching her', *The Guardian*, 24 March 2004.

emotional acceptance speech, Theron expressed love and thanks to her mother for all the sacrifices she made in order for her to be able to attain fame and fortune in America and make her 'dreams come true'. The disturbing questions raised in *Life and Death* and *Monster*, about violence and sexual abuse and deprivation, about poverty and the lives of the underclass, are subsumed beneath this story of the American dream come good. Broomfield picks up on this elision when he expresses disappointment 'that there has been so little discussion of Wuornos's life' in amidst all the hoopla about 'the idea of the beautiful Theron transforming herself into the overweight, boozy, psychotic Wuornos'.<sup>49</sup>

It is possible, however, to interpret the moment when the beautiful Hollywood actress receives her Oscar as extending both the documentary's and the drama's attempts to redeem Wuornos. This impulse towards redemption is apparent in the opening lines of *Monster*, a voiceover spoken by Theron in the role of Wuornos:

I always wanted to be in the movies. When I was little I thought for sure one day I could be a big, big star or maybe just beautiful. Beautiful and rich like the women on TV. . . . Whenever I was down I would just escape into my mind to my other life where I was someone else . . . I was always secretly looking for who was going to discover me . . . they would somehow believe in me just enough. They would see me for what I could be and think I was beautiful. . . . They would take me away to a new life . . . where everything would be different.

Collapsing Theron into Wuornos and vice versa, *Monster* seeks to fulfil the wish expressed here, transporting Wuornos to a fictional space where she is washed clean and renewed in the figure of the beautiful actress. A similar impulse is present in *Life and Death*, with its use of childhood photos of Wuornos and its evocation of the life she might have lived if she 'hadn't had to leave [her] home and sleep in the cars' during the cold Michigan winters.

The play on appearance and disappearance generated by the synergy between the two films, and the crossing of the boundaries between reality and fiction, seems connected to a desire on the part of audiences to uncover or unveil the difference between Theron and Wuornos. This desire works both ways: we search not only for Wuornos in the performance of Theron, but also for glimpses of Theron in Wuornos's performance. The 'real' Wuornos found in Broomfield's documentary is scrutinized to see how the performance of the stunning actress in *Monster* matches up. For example, in his review of the documentary, Stephen Holden of *The New York Times* finds himself recalling Theron's performance while watching Wuornos and is impressed at the recreation of 'Wuornos's crooked teeth'. He concludes that the 'vocal similarity between the fictional and the actual Aileen, although not exact, is striking'.<sup>50</sup> A conflation of Theron and Wuornos occurs in such passages. But it is Ebert's review of Broomfield's documentary that is perhaps

50 Stephen Holden, 'Real life behind "Monster": a serial killer's last days', *The New York Times*, 9 January 2004.

most interesting for what it has to say about the relationship between reality and performance and the collapse between the two:

Wuornos herself is onscreen for much of the film. Charlize Theron has earned almost unanimous praise for her portrayal of Aileen in the current film *Monster*, and her performance stands up to direct comparison with the real woman. There were times, indeed, when I perceived no significant difference between the woman in the documentary and the one in the feature film. Theron has internalized and empathized with Wuornos so successfully that to experience the real woman is only to understand more completely how remarkable Theron's performance is.<sup>51</sup>

51 Ebert, 'Monster'.

Here, reality is contrasted with performance but in a way that conflates the two categories completely: by this account, there is no longer any real or discernible difference between the actress and the 'real woman'. What is being expressed here, I would like to suggest, is a powerful desire to be fooled by appearances, a desire to find the 'truth' in something fictional. The question of 'truth' is central to Broomfield's documentary pursuit of his subject. Feeding into a strong cultural desire to access a terrible, unbelievable 'real', Broomfield's role as filmmaker merges with those of the detective and the psychoanalyst. At the beginning of *Life and Death*, Wuornos tells Broomfield that she killed in cold blood and that she was lying when she said it was in self-defence. The purpose of Broomfield's second documentary is apparently to get Wuornos to retract this dramatic turnabout and admit to the truth of her earlier testimony – 'What I did was what anybody else would do, I defended myself' – something that he does rather dubiously achieve, as I will shortly discuss.

It is possible to read *Life and Death* in terms of the generic codes and conventions of film noir: Broomfield's onscreen persona is that of the intrepid male investigator of the mysterious femme fatale. In this regard, it is telling that the female coauthor of the film, Joan Churchill, remains for the most part invisible in the documentary, an absence that is repeated in the promotion surrounding the film, as well as in reviews. The gender politics underlying the documentary are explicitly revealed in Channel Four's advertising campaign, which heralded its television release. Beside a closeup of a serious-looking Broomfield runs the following caption: 'She [Wuornos] killed the last man who got this close'. Noting that Wuornos is 'already the subject of an Oscar-winning film "Monster"', the advertisement promises a thrilling night's television viewing in which we see Broomfield getting 'up close to the *real monster*' (my italics). Although Broomfield has said he objected to this sensationalist advertisement,<sup>52</sup> its depiction of him as the one man who can get close to the notorious female serial killer is revealing, I think, of how the documentary plays on the gender codes of film noir. Consider, for example, this description of film noir from E. Ann Kaplan:

52 See Broomfield's discussion of this in Wood, *Nick Broomfield*, p. 230.

53 E. Ann Kaplan (ed.), 'The place of women in Fritz Lang's *The Blue Gardenia*', *Women in Film Noir* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), p. 81.

54 Jon Dovey, *Freakshow: First Person Media and Factual Television* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p. 35.

55 See Stella Bruzzi's discussion of contemporary documentary in *New Documentary: a Critical Introduction* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2000).

56 See Tom Gunning, 'An aesthetic of astonishment: early film and the (in)credulous spectator', in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds), *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings* (New York, NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 825.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 823.

58 Helen Piper, 'Reality TV, *Wife Swap* and the drama of banality', *Screen*, vol. 45, no. 4 (2004), pp. 284, 282.

In the typical film noir, the world is presented from the point of view of the male investigator, who often recounts something that happened in the past. The investigator, functioning in a nightmare world where all the clues to meaning are deliberately hidden, seeks to unravel a mystery with which he has been presented. He is in general a reassuring presence in the noir world: we identify with him and rely on him to use reason and cunning, if not to outwit the criminals then at least to solve the enigma.<sup>53</sup>

Broomfield is certainly a 'reassuring' presence in the film, although he never does 'solve the enigma'. Of Broomfield's recent documentaries on infamous women, including Heidi Fleiss, Margaret Thatcher and Courtney Love, Jon Dovey writes that 'there is clearly no smoking gun of "the true story" to be found. . . . The "final truth" is unattainable, cannot be expressed but can only be hinted at, evoked but never spoken.'<sup>54</sup> It is this ambiguity of character and motivation that is perhaps the most compelling element of Broomfield's documentary account of Wuornos. In spite of, or perhaps because of, the amount of staging and constructing that has gone into filming, it is the unpredictable moments of emotional insight inevitably captured by the camera which are gripping. For the contemporary audiences of reality television and 'new documentary',<sup>55</sup> what is of primary interest is the presentation and transformation of reality through contrived moments of revelation. There is an interesting link to be drawn between the contemporary renegotiation of the boundaries between reality and fiction and Tom Gunning's account of early cinema audiences. Gunning argues that early film spectators did not simply mistake film images for 'reality', as is often asserted. Rather, they were enthralled with the *illusion* of reality on offer. As Gunning writes, in the early 'cinema of attractions', the 'spectator does not get lost in a fictional world and its drama, but remains aware of the act of looking, the excitement of curiosity and its fulfillment'.<sup>56</sup> Gunning's discussion of the contradictory role of the spectator, who 'vacillates between belief and incredulity',<sup>57</sup> is significant for interpreting the play on questions of appearance/disappearance, truth/falsity and reality/fiction, which appears in the exchange between *Life and Death* and *Monster*.

It is important, for example, to note the extent to which the interviews in *Life and Death* are presented to us as a dramatic staging of reality. Wuornos is shown preparing herself for interviews. 'Let me do this thing over one more time', she tells Broomfield as she readies herself, fixing her microphone and bending over to flip her hair out of her face. In her interviews with Broomfield, Wuornos delivers performances, not in the sense of a "'trained" demonstration', but in the sense that there is a 'conscious desire to present, explain and justify [herself] through a display of action to the camera and, by implication, to the viewer'.<sup>58</sup>

One scene is especially relevant in thinking through the issue of truth and performance in *Life and Death*. It is Broomfield's second interview with Wuornos at Broward Prison. A buoyant Wuornos is happy to see 'Nick', as she always calls him. During the interview, Wuornos becomes angry about the delays in her execution: 'I'm so fucking mad I can't see straight. They're daring me to kill again'. The camera is then turned off, or at least Wuornos thinks it is turned off. We are presented with a shot of the wall, which Broomfield voices over with the following: 'Aileen waited till she thought we weren't filming to talk about the murders'. The next shot is of Broomfield's profile as he leans closer to the pane of glass separating him from Wuornos, and we hear her whisper that it was, in fact, self-defence but that she cannot admit to it on tape because the officials are 'too corrupt': 'They will never do me right. They will just fuck me over some more so I can only go to the death'. As Wuornos goes to leave the interview room, Churchill appears onscreen, holding the camera, and the two women acknowledge each other. Wuornos, still unaware that Churchill has been secretly filming her, says it was nice to see her.

Broomfield says that they did not set out to trick Wuornos deliberately, but felt it was important the 'truth' be heard. Still, it is a difficult moment, and many writing in the field of documentary ethics would take issue with the decision to film Wuornos without her knowledge.<sup>59</sup> Others might contend that at least Broomfield and Churchill openly show us the documentary process by revealing the 'covert'.<sup>60</sup> What I find most interesting to examine, however, is how the above scene positions the audience, and how that relates to the distinctions between truth and performance, reality and contrivance at work in the documentary. With our knowledge that the camera remains on, we are placed in a conspiratorial relation to Broomfield; what Stella Bruzzi notes of Broomfield's documentary on Heidi Fleiss is applicable here, we are 'lulled into a sense that we are indeed, once more, to occupy the privileged position of those whom Broomfield lets in on the act'.<sup>61</sup> The question of performance is central: the film suggests that it is only when Wuornos stops performing for the camera that the 'truth' emerges. At the same time, however, Churchill's sudden and unexpected appearance in the documentary is an unintended moment of disruption, which calls attention to the constructed nature of Broomfield's onscreen persona as the lone male investigator. It reminds the viewer of a world beyond the screen to which we are not privy and underscores the fact that Broomfield's persona is, as Bruzzi notes, 'an act, a ploy on [his] part to get the material he wants'.<sup>62</sup>

Joel Black argues that 'while reality has never been more in demand, it has also never been more at issue. Reality in liberal, democratic, mass-mediated societies no longer is self-evident, but is constantly contested and up for grabs'.<sup>63</sup> Our yearning for the real is powerful, if elusive, so this is why, perhaps, in reviews of the films, Wuornos is found to be as good or less good and either more or less 'real' than Theron and

59 Brian Winston, 'The tradition of the victim', in Larry Gross, John Stuart Katz and Jay Ruby (eds), *Image Ethics: the Moral Rights of Subjects in Photographs, Film, and Television* (New York, NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 34–57; Calvin Pryluck, 'Ultimately we are all outsiders: the ethics of documentary filmmaking', in Alan Rosenthal and John Corner (eds), *New Challenges for Documentary* (New York, NY and Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 255–68.

60 Jay Ruby, 'The ethics of image making: or, "They're going to put me in the movies. They're going to make a big star out of me..."', in Rosenthal and Corner (eds), *New Challenges for Documentary*, p. 210.

61 Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, p. 178.

62 Ibid., p. 171.

63 Joel Black, *The Reality Effect: Film Culture and the Graphic Imperative* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2002), p. 15.



64 Ibid., pp. 15–6.

65 Miriam Basilio, 'Corporal evidence: representations of Aileen Wuornos', *Art Journal*, vol. 55, no. 4 (1996), p. 58.

66 Dorothy Allison, *Skin: Talking About Sex, Class and Literature* (London: Pandora, 1995), p. 13.

67 Paige Schilt, 'Media whores and perverse media: documentary film meets tabloid TV in Nick Broomfield's *Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer*', *Velvet Light Trap*, no. 45 (Spring 2000), p. 57.

68 See Schilt, 'Media whores', for an excellent analysis of how Broomfield's first documentary, *The Selling of a Serial Killer*, actively constructs an idea of Wuornos as 'white trash', pp. 58–9.

vice versa. 'It isn't merely that movies compete with reality', suggests Black, but that 'movies compete with other movies (and studios with other studios) in rendering an authentic – that is, graphic – view of reality'.<sup>64</sup>

The presentation – or more to the point the sensationalization – of reality in both documentary and drama revolves around Wuornos's class background. For if images of Wuornos as poor 'white trash' were used to vilify her in the popular press, in the filmic renditions of her story they are used to generate sympathy, albeit in troubling ways. By uncovering her violent past, Broomfield shows compassion for Wuornos as a damaged and abused person but at times the relationship between his voiceover and the images he shows presents 'her working-class family background and physical traits as evidence of her capacity for crime'.<sup>65</sup> When he visits Wuornos's childhood friend, Dawn Botkins, Broomfield comes across a series of family photographs. These photographs of Wuornos's family members are screened as Broomfield reads what develops into a catalogue of horror:

Aileen aged four. Her brother Keith aged six. Aileen's biological mother Diane who abandoned Aileen when she was just six months old. Aileen's father Leo who was convicted of kidnapping and sodomizing an eight-year old boy. He committed suicide in prison. Aileen's grandfather Lowry who she called dad and who is rumoured to be Aileen's biological father. He abused both Aileen and her mother. Aileen aged 13 when she got pregnant and had a baby boy that was put up for adoption.

However sympathetic Broomfield is to his subject, a certain sense of 'us and them' emerges at such moments. In her essay, 'A question of class', Dorothy Allison writes of the intense pain she experienced when she overheard people talk about her and her poor white Southern family in the context of 'they'. 'They, those people over there, those people who are not us, they die so easily, kill each other so casually. They are different. We, I thought. Me.'<sup>66</sup> Wuornos appears to experience a similar pain and there are poignant moments in the documentary when she wants to 'set the record straight', insisting that she came from a 'good, clean family'. Although there is little question that Wuornos had a very troubled and indeed tragic upbringing, the problem is that Broomfield does not openly discuss or engage with questions of class. Paige Schilt persuasively argues in her incisive analysis of Broomfield's first documentary on Wuornos, *The Selling of a Serial Killer*, that he tends to reify rather than explore the discourses of class, gender and sexuality that frame Wuornos's story. As Schilt suggests, 'He does not provide viewers with the tools to critique the gender, sexual, and class biases embedded in dominant media images of Wuornos'.<sup>67</sup> The omission of an analytical or critical framework effectively reinforces dominant ideas of Wuornos as a 'white trash' woman who killed or a woman who killed because she was 'white trash'.<sup>68</sup>



There is occasionally also a tabloid tone to Broomfield's voiceover of Wuornos's life story, which can come across as glib:

Aileen, aged sixteen, left Michigan and travelled down here to Florida looking for sun and friends. She was young and pretty and earning good money as a hooker but with a violent temper and soon in trouble. She knocked one man out with a beer bottle, another with a billiard ball. She particularly liked it here near Daytona Beach. This is one of the motels, the Fairview, where she frequently stayed. It was all so new and exciting.

This is the stuff of true crime and pulp fiction and the risk is that it tends towards 'lurid redescription' rather than critical investigation.<sup>69</sup> The images that Broomfield chooses to signify Wuornos's lifestyle and sexual relationship can also be problematic. When recounting her relationship with Tyria Moore, Broomfield tells us that their 'favourite pastime was drinking beer and firing their pistols in the wood'; the documentary then supplies us with the ideologically loaded visual signifier of a broken television set on a stump in the forest.

Although it is not discussed in reviews of the film or in the promotional material, the love story in *Monster* is similarly framed through the issue of what Lisa Henderson calls 'class pathology'.<sup>70</sup> The class difference between Wuornos and her girlfriend, Tyria Moore, was referred to quite extensively in the real-life case and appeared to influence the police's treatment of Moore (the idea being that she was a 'good' girl from a middle-class family, whereas Wuornos was a 'bad' girl who came from a long line of poor trash). *Monster* continually reaffirms the fact that the women come from very different social positions; Selby, the fictional character based on Moore but whose name is changed in the film for legal reasons, is surrounded by people who care about her and stays in a comfortable, suburban home, whereas the character of 'Lee' (short for Aileen) is a 'street person' (the term used to describe her in the film) who has no family and keeps what few possessions she has in a storage garage.

A waif-like Christina Ricci plays the role of Selby. The visual contrast between the fictionalized character of Selby and Wuornos's real-life lover could not be more extreme, and given the extraordinary lengths to which Theron was transformed to look like Wuornos, it seems a significant casting decision. In real life, Wuornos's girlfriend was her physical approximation and the two women strongly resembled each other. However, in *Monster*, the difference in physical size between the actresses is considerable, with a hulking Theron towering over Ricci in every scene. Theron is tall and chunky with long dirty blonde hair; Ricci is small and dark-haired and dressed to appear cute and boyish. According to Jenkins: 'It wasn't about making someone look just like her real girlfriend, it was about capturing that essence. To put another actress next to Charlize and to have her missing teeth and be fat I just thought would push the audience away.'<sup>71</sup> Too much sameness between the

69 Mark Seltzer, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1998), p. 8.

70 See Lisa Henderson, 'The class character of *Boys Don't Cry*', *Screen*, vol. 42, no. 3 (2001), p. 302.

71 Cited in *The Making of a Monster* included on *Monster* DVD.

women might be threatening therefore the difference has to be exaggerated so that spectators can distance themselves from the odd couple. At the same time, the difference is never too extreme and Lee and Selby's relationship works according to familiar paradigms readily recuperable by a middle-class, heterosexual audience.

If *Life and Death* is film noir, then *Monster* is pure melodrama, firmly establishing itself as a women's film with a focus on romantic love. Judith Halberstam has noted how *Boys Don't Cry* (Kimberly Peirce, 1999) turns the complex true-life story on which it is based into a universal 'streamlined humanist romance'.<sup>72</sup> The same can be said of *Monster*. The trailer shows several images of Lee and Selby in romantic clinches, accompanied by the following captions on screen: 'Every Chance. Every Risk. Everything She Did. She Did for Love.' *Monster* is shorn of many details of the actual story such as the police investigation, the intense media interest in the case, the various trials and Wuornos's twelve years on death row. What we are left with is the love story between Lee and Selby and the depiction of Wuornos's killing spree, with the film making associations between the sex and the death.

The title *Monster* is meant to refer to the media's construction of Wuornos, an issue the film itself does not explore in any detail. There is also a poetic reference to a 'monster', which is the name of a giant ferris wheel that Lee fantasized about going on as a little girl. I would argue, though, that the title *Monster* primarily signals the film's status as a monster movie in the way of a film such as *King Kong* or *Frankenstein*, with Lee as the tragic monster who horrifies us but for whom we are made to feel sympathy. As James Snead suggests, monster movies are interesting to analyze for the collective fears and fantasies they reveal about a culture; the figure of the monster functions as scapegoat and repository for a number of guilty desires. Ultimately these desires are dealt with and contained through the death of the monster at the film's conclusion.<sup>73</sup>

Discussing the real-life case, Lynda Hart notes how Wuornos was reluctant to conform to the theory that she was a victim of past childhood trauma. Hart writes that 'there is something fascinating, and unnerving, in [Wuornos's] implacable self-defense, her disregard for a linear narrative of a life's trajectory that begins with victimization and ends in retaliation'.<sup>74</sup> It is therefore interesting to explore how both documentary and drama are keen to develop just such a linear tale of victimization and retaliation. Broomfield and Jenkins present Wuornos as a traumatized victim. Where the fiction film visualizes moments of traumatic experience and death, the documentary must evoke trauma in other ways,<sup>75</sup> through the use of confession, testimony and the exploration of what Mark Seltzer in *Serial Killers* calls 'lethal spaces'.<sup>76</sup> Broomfield includes footage of himself driving up and down highways past restaurants and service stations, evoking what Seltzer has referred to as the 'pathologized experience of public spaces' exposed in stories of serial killers.<sup>77</sup> In the scenes in the woods and in the images of the streets

72 Judith Halberstam, 'The transgender gaze in *Boys Don't Cry*', *Screen*, vol. 42, no. 3 (2001), p. 298.

73 James Snead, *White Screens/Black Images: Hollywood from the Dark Side* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1994).

74 Hart, *Fatal Women*, p. 152.

75 The most interesting recent work on documentary considers its status as an art form uniquely poised for an exploration of trauma. As Anita Biressi notes, what documentary has in common with 'true crime and talk show confession' is 'an attempt to construct a topography of unrepresentable elements such as interior states: memory, trauma and fear'. See Biressi, 'Inside/out: private trauma and public knowledge in true crime documentary', *Screen*, vol. 45, no. 4 (2004), p. 405 and Heather Nunn, 'Errol Morris: documentary as psychic drama', *Screen*, vol. 45, no. 4 (2004), pp. 413–22.

76 Seltzer, *Serial Killers*, pp. 45–8.

77 Seltzer, *Serial Killers*, p. 304.

78 Biressi, 'Inside/out', p. 407.

79 Recent representations of rape are notable for their explicitness. Gaspar Noé's *Irreversible* (2002), for example, includes a nine-minute rape scene, which was passed by the British Board of Film Classification on the grounds that it is a 'harrowing and vivid portrayal of the brutality of rape' and is 'not designed to titillate'. See 'BBFC passes *Irreversible* uncut for adult cinema audiences'. URL: [http://www.bbfc.co.uk/website/2000Aboutnsf/News/\\$first?OpenDocument&AutoFra...](http://www.bbfc.co.uk/website/2000Aboutnsf/News/$first?OpenDocument&AutoFra...) [accessed 3 November 2002]. The idea is that the spectacle of rape is so real, so harrowing, that it demands to be seen, reinforcing a powerful conception of cinema as a medium that educates and transforms the spectator. See a more detailed exploration of this issue in my work *Public Rape: Representing Violation in Fiction and Film* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2004).

80 Dovey, *Freakshow*, p. 32.

81 Broomfield, in Wood, *Nick Broomfield*, p. 231.

and houses of the area where Wuornos grew up, as well as on the highways where she met with strange men, 'the landscape becomes imbued with meaning; in this case memorials for traumatic events, possibly deaths'.<sup>78</sup> Scenes shot from the interior of houses that Broomfield visits to interview various people from Wuornos's past, such as her biological mother who abandoned her when she was still a baby, also strongly evoke personal and familial trauma.

As a fiction film, *Monster* is able to represent traumatic experience much more explicitly. The defining trauma of the film, which is presented early on, is Lee's rape in the woods by one of her johns. The scene is based on Wuornos's courtroom testimony regarding the first man she murdered, Richard Mallory. In *Monster*, Mallory is depicted as a violent, psychotic rapist who knocks Lee unconscious and ties her up on the front seat of the car. When she awakens, he rapes her with a tire iron. He pours cleaning fluid over her genitals and is about to rape her again, when Lee breaks loose and shoots him. In keeping with other recent representations of rape in contemporary cinema, this disturbing visualization of sexual violation is designed to show the graphic brutality of the crime.<sup>79</sup> The rape is the primal scene of the film and it overlays the other scenes in which Lee murders her johns. I would suggest that the rape scene in *Monster* largely derives its dramatic charge from its close association with Wuornos's powerful courtroom testimony of the rape, as presented in Broomfield's documentary. That testimony is rendered here in visual detail and offered up to us as a truthful spectacle of the real.

In *Life and Death*, Broomfield's persistent attempts to get Wuornos to admit to the 'truth' culminate in his final interview with her the day before her execution, where his investigative technique is more aggressive than previously. As in other Broomfield documentaries, 'the moments when "Nick gets angry on camera" are deliberately constructed as narrative climaxes'.<sup>80</sup> When he questions her on why she killed the seven men, an exasperated Wuornos tells him: 'Oh you are lost Nick. I was a hitchhiking hooker, running into trouble. I'd shoot the guy if I ran into trouble, physical trouble.' When Broomfield insists on pressing further: 'but how come there was so much physical trouble – because it was all in one year – seven people in one year?!' Wuornos snaps. The interview ends in dramatic fashion with Wuornos in an extreme closeup in which she speaks directly both to Broomfield and to the camera: 'You're an inhumane bunch of fucking living bastards and bitches . . . . You don't just take human life like this and sabotage it and rip it apart like Jesus on the cross and say thanks a lot for all the money I made off you and not care about a human being and the truth being told.' Wuornos cuts the interview short and gives the camera the finger. Broomfield shouts out that he is sorry as Wuornos is led away by prison guards.

The scene is distressing. Broomfield himself has described it as 'biblical' and states that he finds it difficult to watch: 'it's hard not to feel the comment is aimed at you [the viewer]'.<sup>81</sup> It is perhaps in order to cope with the ramifications of that sentiment that the next shot brings us back

to a familiar position – behind the windscreen of a car, Broomfield's favoured point of view shot. Dawn Botkins, Wuornos's childhood friend, tells Broomfield that Wuornos is sorry: 'She didn't give you the finger. She gave the media the finger and the attorneys the finger . . . she knew if she said much more it could make a difference at her execution tomorrow so she just decided not to.' The moment seems intended to assuage Broomfield and the viewer that Wuornos's rage was not directed towards him (or us). This sense that we are somehow outside of the ghoulis media exploitation of her life and death, as evidenced in the tabloid television footage that announces her execution as a 'Date with Death', is reinforced in the next image, a shot of the prison in the early morning on the day of execution. Broomfield drives by the crews of media teams waiting to report on her death. Focusing on the glare of the media lights and the journalists talking into their microphones, the suggestion is that Broomfield is distanced from this brouhaha, even though shortly afterwards he will release his documentary as a package with a major feature film. Indeed the last time we see Broomfield in the documentary he is wearing his trademark white shirt surrounded by a media scrum eager to hear his story. At the documentary's conclusion, music begins playing and the following caption comes onscreen: 'Aileen requested to be cremated with her bible and to have this song played at her wake'. The final image is of Dawn Botkins walking towards her house as a caption tells us that 'Dawn scattered Aileen's ashes here at her farm'.

In contrast to this personalized tableau, the conclusion of *Monster* occurs in the public space of the courtroom. Lee breaks down in tears as Selby testifies against her. As Lee receives a sentence of execution, she has a final rant against the judge and society for sending a 'raped woman to death'. Her ironic voiceover lists a number of platitudes, including 'Love conquers all' and 'Every cloud has a silver lining'. She looks directly at the audience. 'Hmph. They gotta tell you something'. The prison guards lead her through a doorway into a glowing white light. A black caption comes on screen: 'Aileen and Selby never spoke again'. And then the final printed message: 'Aileen Wuornos was executed on October 9th, 2002, after 12 years on Florida's Death Row'.

The dramatic ending of *Monster* universalizes Wuornos's story as a tale of love and betrayal. Despite its earlier exploration of trauma, *Monster* ultimately suggests that Lee is executed because of her great love for Selby whose demands were what pushed her to commit the string of murders in the first place. The excessive demands of queer love, as presented in *Monster*, lead to death and destruction. Where Broomfield presents his film as an anti-death-penalty polemic, it is interesting to note that Jenkins has stated she is not against the death penalty per se and that in the case of Wuornos, there was no other way out: 'it was a ruined life, it was not salvageable', she is quoted as saying.<sup>82</sup> *Monster* glosses over and aestheticizes Wuornos's death (represented symbolically by the white light). And, while *Monster* elsewhere seeks to go where the documentary cannot, using the force of

82 Jenkins, in Aitkenhead, 'The gift of a killer'.

<sup>83</sup> Working on the premiss that 'truth' can be derived from fiction, Jenkins draws on a familiar rationale for docudrama in explaining *Monster's* project: 'It was a period of time a documentary could never make a film about'. A narrative film, suggests Jenkins, is best equipped to 'really examine what happened' and delve into the time (1989–90) when Wuornos was living with her girlfriend and began killing men. See *The Making of a Monster*, on the *Monster* DVD.

<sup>84</sup> See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1990) and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>85</sup> Snead, *White Screens*, p. 23.

fiction to imagine scenes from Wuornos's final days with her lover,<sup>83</sup> it is significant that it concludes with Theron performing or 'impersonating' one of Wuornos's courtroom outbursts (included in *Broomfield's* documentary). As throughout the film, Theron's performance here works through repetition and reiteration. Following Judith Butler's theory of performativity,<sup>84</sup> one might argue, finally, that Theron's 'uncanny' impersonation of Wuornos's gestures and mannerisms brings Wuornos into being – another reason, perhaps, why her performance is seen as so 'real'. But by choosing to replay this courtroom moment in the film's final scenes, *Monster* also firmly situates Wuornos in the realm of the law, a gesture that would appear, on some level, to reconsolidate the legitimacy of the legal order and its containment of Wuornos as violent other. For while *Monster* invites us to feel sympathy for the 'creature' that has lumbered before us on screen, committing a number of sexual and social transgressions, any sympathy is contained by the 'otherness the monster represents'.<sup>85</sup>

I am indebted to Tina Kendall for her thoughts on the relationship between reality and fiction, redemption and performance and the 'cinema of attractions'. Thanks also to Catherine Silverstone, Sarah Barrow and Hugh Perry for their helpful comments.

# Screen

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Simon Frith

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## Partition and the uses of history in *Waqt/Time*

REBECCA M. BROWN

One of the early 'lost-and-found' stories<sup>1</sup> produced in the South Asian film studios of Bollywood, *Waqt/Time* (Yash Chopra, 1965) follows a young family from the moment they are separated by a major earthquake to their final reunion as adults in mid-1960s Bombay.<sup>2</sup> Film historian Rachel Dwyer has remarked that the film operates as a metaphor for the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947.<sup>3</sup> In the years leading up to South Asia's independence from over two centuries of British colonial rule, political forces tied to religious identities struggled with the balance of power between an Islamic minority and a Hindu majority. Despite calls from various quarters that religion should not be the deciding factor, it was decided to split British India into two independent nations: India and Pakistan, the latter geographically separated into East and West Pakistan. The division of the subcontinent led to large-scale migration across these new, arbitrary lines, causing upheaval on both sides of the border.

Violence against minority populations in both countries led to the death of over 200,000 people.<sup>4</sup> At the border that split the state of Bengal in two, Mahatma Gandhi helped to bring the violence to an end with a hunger fast. In the west, where the state of Punjab was split, the violence continued. The horrors of Partition, the shame of many who witnessed them, and the resentments against both the incoming and outgoing governments for not controlling the violence sooner meant that many in both nations wished to bury this episode, particularly in light of the new hope arising from the establishment of independent nations upon Partition in 1947.<sup>5</sup>

Because of the sensitivity of the topic, the film *Waqt* does not directly portray Partition, but instead uses an earthquake as a metaphor for this break. I investigate the implications of this metaphor for what it tells us

1 The 'lost-and-found' genre involves family members losing touch with one another because of some sort of calamity; they are 'found' when reunited at the conclusion of the film. After *Waqt*, it becomes a typical narrative in Bollywood cinema. The genre can be found earlier in films such as *Kismet* (Gyan Mukherjee, 1943); a later example is *Amar Akbar Anthony* (Manmohan Desai, 1977).

2 As the name of the city was not changed to Mumbai until 1994, I use the name by which the city was known during the 1950s and 1960s.

3 Rachel Dwyer, *Yash Chopra* (London: British Film Institute, 2002), p. 43.

4 The death toll from Partition has been estimated in a range from 200,000 to five million, with most estimates hovering at around 500,000. See Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). As Pandey points out, however, the number of casualties has been very difficult to ascertain and remains the site of rumour and guesswork (p. 89). In addition to the deaths, millions of South Asians (some estimate twelve million: Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000]) migrated from their home regions to the other side of the new border, splitting up families and contributing to widespread poverty.

5 Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence*.



6 Sumita S. Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema, 1947–1987* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1993), p. 204.

7 Partha Chatterjee, 'Introduction', in Partha Chatterjee (ed.), *Wages of Freedom: Fifty Years of the Indian Nation-State* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 5–17.

8 The 'viewer' of *Waqt* would have included the urban middle and upper classes, but film viewing extended across India even to non-urban areas. The cinema industry had been long established in small villages by the mid 1960s, and film viewing was a relatively widespread practice. Thus these movies speak to a rising urban middle class as well as to rural audiences.

about India's relation to its past in the mid 1960s. Jawaharlal Nehru served as Prime Minister of the new Indian nation from Independence until his death in 1964. The 'Nehruvian era' is marked by a push towards modernization of industry and an optimism about India's future. *Waqt* was released the year after Nehru's death, immediately after the India–Pakistan War of 1965, and therefore at a transitional period for the nation and, by extension, for Hindi cinema.<sup>6</sup> The film shows us a moment in India's formation of a national identity fraught with regret, nostalgia and a memory of past hubris during the pre-1947 drive for nationhood. Despite the modernization schemes of Nehru, the pre-Independence vision of 'life after colonialism' was not realized in the lives of most Indians.<sup>7</sup> The Partition metaphor allows *Waqt* to perform three tasks. First, the film participates in a certain nostalgic melancholy for pre-Partition India, a longing for a simpler time prior to the devastation of the earthquake/Partition. *Waqt* also shores up an ebbing hope in the new modern independent India. This hope is particularly important in the face of continued tension between India and Pakistan and the recent death of Nehru, who was a central symbol of national unity and modernization. Finally, the film provides its viewers with a vision of how modern India might look, showing us spaces, fashions and relationships that offer models of how to live as both Indian and modern.<sup>8</sup>

To explore these three elements of the film, I will first outline the way in which the Partition metaphor operates, reading the moment of the earthquake and its before-and-after scenes. I then turn to the role of Bombay in *Waqt*, as a marker of the modern in the film; I contrast its treatment of the city to that found in an earlier film, *Shree 420/Mr 420* (Raj Kapoor, 1955). In a series of sections relating the two films, I argue that *Waqt*'s relationship to Partition and India's recent past represents a complete break from earlier nostalgias for an ahistorical, precolonial India as figured by the space of the village and the villager. It is in the contrast with *Shree 420* that *Waqt* becomes a marker for the new, post-Nehruvian India and a new construction of what modern India might be.

The name of the film, *Waqt*, indicates its overarching theme: Time can bring prosperity or drought and one should not assume that it will always be the former. Hubris in the face of Time will lead to one's downfall. This lesson is learned the hard way by Lala Kedarnath (Balraj Sahni), whose celebration of his newly expanded storefront turns into disaster when an earthquake destroys the town, separating him from his wife and three sons. The film sets up a stark contrast between the before and after settings that the family inhabits, and, in the distinction, provides a clear temporal shift between a pre- and post-Independence time and location. Thus, the moment of the earthquake serves as the major break, metaphorically referencing the moment of Independence and the destruction wrought to families and property by Partition.

Architecture and interior design signal this shift very clearly and allow the viewer to identify the two periods and, more importantly, to see how

9 Rachel Dwyer and Divia Patel, *Cinema India: the Visual Culture of Hindi Film* (Newark, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), pp. 52, 71.

‘modern India’ looks in contrast to the subcontinent before Independence. The opening shot of the film establishes the pre-Independence setting, as we watch a horse-drawn cart come towards us along a bustling street. Signs are primarily in Urdu, indicating that the region is in northern India, possibly in what became West Pakistan after Partition. A new sign is raised over the shop, Lala Kedarnath & Sons, selling carpets and dry goods, with smaller signs indicating a specialism in Kashmiri goods (reemphasizing the setting as northern). When we move into the interior, the overarching decor is in Bollywood baronial style, with high ceilings, large mouldings, chandeliers of etched Dutch glass, ebony headboards and European- and Mughal-inspired details throughout (figure 1).<sup>9</sup> The camera makes sure that we observe these details, pausing to linger over the chandelier in the main room both in this scene and again in Lala Kedarnath’s memory after the earthquake.



Fig. 1.  
‘There goes Kedarnath!’ *Waqt/*  
*Time* (Yash Chopra, 1965).

After the first, famous song, O Meri Zohra Jabeen, in which Kedarnath declares his love for his wife, an astrologer is urged to read Kedarnath’s palm. Kedarnath protests, stating that he does not believe in these things, and asserts that he already knows what his sons will accomplish, reciting their future successes for the guests. The wise astrologer then suggests that ‘One can’t really say what Time will force a man to do’ and urges Kedarnath to forsake his hubris and be wary of Time’s fickleness. Kedarnath dismisses this advice, and later that evening serenades his wife with visions of their wealthy future together, stating he will buy a car for them to ride around in, so that people will say: there goes Kedarnath. At that moment, the earthquake devastates the house and the town. In a series of quick-cut disaster shots, we are shown

the architecture of the town more broadly than in the earlier street scene: the shots include late-Mughal and colonial-style housing, dominated by a Taj Mahal-like tomb. Fire consumes the town as shadowy figures run screaming through the streets. Interestingly, the Mughal past seems the only thing not to fall in the earth-shattering rumbles. We see the dome still standing as the newer structures disintegrate. The entirety of the past has not been destroyed, only the most recent era.

In the early scenes of familial bliss prior to the earthquake, the chandelier becomes an additional character in the visual narrative of the film. It serves as a bridge connecting the space of Kedarnath's wife and the other women to his own space in the opening musical number, as the camera cranes up from her face to the chandelier, pauses and then cranes down to Kedarnath's circle of men. During the earthquake, a different but similarly-styled chandelier tellingly falls crashing to the ground. In this case, it punctuates the dramatic moment of devastation, while again directly interacting with Kedarnath's person, compositionally (but not actually) falling onto his body as he is thrown to the ground. His rich surroundings have been ruined, along with his livelihood and his future. The only element not utterly destroyed by the earthquake is the wall clock, to which the camera pans after witnessing Kedarnath fall unconscious in the rubble. The not-so-subtle allusion to the theme of the film indicates that time will go on, despite the loss of wealth (and hubris) that the Kedarnath family experiences.

These early scenes establish a 'before' that operates both on the filmic level – a happy family together, facing the future with confidence and hope – and on the allegorical level, marking the optimistic moment before Independence when the possibilities of a new nation free from the yoke of British colonialism seemed infinite. Coming on the heels of India's participation in World War II on behalf of the British, and following various political and activist movements to rid the subcontinent of the colonizers, Independence was, by the 1940s, anticipated by most. As a result, the expectations for what life might be like following Independence were high. It is not surprising, therefore, that the anticipation of prosperity and justice for all parties would not be met by the realities of the political, economic and social issues the independent government had to address, from caste and language politics to overwhelming poverty.

That *Waqf*'s 'before' phase is situated in a colonial-era city in the northern subcontinent echoes the experiences of many in the film industry, as it mirrors the broader experiences of many South Asians displaced after Partition. The migration from the now-partitioned Punjab State and other northwestern regions of the subcontinent to Bombay and the valorization of the lighter-skinned, Urdu-speaking northerner as the quintessential movie star meant that many in the film industry were Punjabi.<sup>10</sup> The division of the Punjab during Partition split many families and moved people away from their ancestral family homes. Nostalgia for a pre-Independence space and time, when families were together and

10 Ibid., p. 20.

11 For more on Husain, see Yashodhara Dalmia, *The Making of Modern Indian Art: the Progressives* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001). For more on the theme of the 'authentic' village and post-independence painting, see Rebecca M. Brown, *Art for a Modern India, 1947-80* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming).

settled in their ancestral villages, permeated much of the culture, making *Waqt*'s lost-and-found theme even more poignant for those living in mid-1960s India.

This nostalgia differs from a longing for a precolonial 'pure' Indian space, as might be found in (and deconstructed by) other examples of modern art from this period. Painters, most famously M.F. Husain, turned to village life as a subject that anchored them in a mythical state of precolonial purity.<sup>11</sup> These explorations of the village were not naive, but they did attempt to find a place for Indianness in a precolonial, 'untouched' context. Rather than presuming such a space could exist or be reclaimed, *Waqt* reads post-Partition India through the moment of disruption itself, idealizing the period just prior to 1947 as one of prosperity and hope opposed to the chaos and the confusion of resettlement. The modern, then, is figured against this pre-Partition backdrop, and rather than trying to work through the colonial past, we have a working-through of a specific moment in time – Partition – and the subsequent loss of optimism after Independence.

Like the pre-earthquake picture of Kedarnath's life, the post-earthquake image is largely communicated through architecture and interiors. The transition from 'then' to 'now' takes place through the bodily movement of the eldest son, Raju. Orphaned by the earthquake, he runs away from the orphanage, down a hill and towards the camera. We fade out from his movement towards us and in to his adult body now running away from the camera. Their shadows are superimposed in the centre of the frame, equating them narratively but also allowing us to make the temporal jump from the earthquake's aftermath to 'now' in 1965. Raju, called Raja in the later phase and played by Raj Kumar, runs through a landscape that defines the fast-paced movement of modern urban India. The architecture includes boxy modernist buildings with primary colour decoration – echoing the newly constructed buildings of Corbusier's Chandigarh with their geometric colouration – as well as low-slung, horizontal residential architecture. Raja runs into his modern dwelling and over the next few scenes we are introduced to several further interiors, including a party scene overlooking the curve of Bombay's Marine Drive, the modern decor of the middle son's (Bablu, now Ravi, played by Sunil Dutt) adopted parental home and the humble dwelling of Kedarnath's wife (Achala Sachdev) and their youngest son, Munna (Shashi Kapoor). Raja and Ravi's mutual love interest, Meena (Sadhana), lives in an expensive home which we are soon shown, decorated completely in the modernist style, with red carpet, low-slung couches, moulded plastic dining chairs and minimalist glass table, and the ubiquitous grand piano set in front of the geometric black-and-white fireplace hearth (figure 2).

References to popular modernist furniture designers abound, from the Eero Saarinen chairs around the dining table to the sofas reminiscent of George Nelson's 1950s designs. The decor is a checklist of the latest fashionable home furnishings, culled from contemporary magazine

Fig. 2.  
Meena (Sadhana) in her living  
room. *Waqt/Time* (Yash Chopra,  
1965).



12 Dwyer, *Yash Chopra*, p. 39.

advertising and the too-perfect interior design of Douglas Sirk's films. Yash Chopra, the director of the film, looked to interior design magazines such as the *Illustrated Weekly of India* for the set design and saw it emulated by his relatives in their own homes.<sup>12</sup> With all of this visual richness, the first twenty-five minutes of our time in the 'now' primarily involve showing the audience both who the characters are and what it should look like to live in a modern house.

That modern house features primary colours, clean lines, curved, manufactured shapes and geometries – all the elements of an international modernist interior design style. This internationalism is underscored by various decorative elements highlighted in these spaces of the 'now', particularly by a Japanese geisha doll to which Meena croons as we are introduced to her space. Much as the chandelier in the earlier scene sets up Kedarnath's pre-earthquake abode, this gesture establishes Meena and her parents as both modern and worldly.

This interior decor is matched by a narrative construction of the modern woman, particularly in the figure of the younger woman in the film, Renu (Sharmila Tagore), who teaches Munna to drive, enjoys both badminton and swimming and generally holds progressive ideas about caste and class. Her appearance, like that of Meena, reflects these tastes, showing the latest styles, bare arms, beehive-style hairdos and the fashionable *churidar kurta*.<sup>13</sup> Thus, through the interior decor, architecture and actions of the women in the film, we are presented with an image of modern India that stands in contrast to the earlier pre-Independence moment figured by Kedarnath's mansion.

In its employment of the earthquake as a metaphor for Partition, *Waqt* gives the mid 1960s viewer two very important outlets for the

13 Ibid., p. 40. See also Dwyer and Patel, *Cinema India*, p. 88. For more on the importance of dress in the context of South Asia, see Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (1946) (London: Penguin, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> Ram Rahman, *Sunil Janah: Photographing India, 1942–1978*, (New York, NY: Gallery at 678, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> Nehru, *The Discovery of India*.

<sup>17</sup> Chatterjee, 'Introduction', p. 5.

imagination of the Indian nation. First, the film acknowledges the destruction effected by Partition and the feeling of hubris associated with the time before Independence, when anything seemed possible. The message of the film – that Kedarnath too glibly assumed that his life would continue on its prosperous track – applies also to the nationalist hopefulness for the future of India after the British had left. Prior to 1947, many different movements had fought and peacefully protested for India's independence from the British. Gandhi had returned from law studies in London and formative experiences in South Africa to lead a movement of nonviolent resistance anchored to the idea that India's strength lay in its vast peasant and village population. Like Gandhi, Nehru was jailed for his activities prior to Independence and while imprisoned wrote a book on India's past and its potential entitled *The Discovery of India*.<sup>14</sup> In it, Nehru articulated his hopes for the future of the Indian nation, many of which he later carried out as prime minister after Independence.

The unbelievable horror and destruction of Partition severed independent India's link to that time of hopefulness – a link rebuilt in part by the planning and optimism of the early Nehru years.<sup>15</sup> Nehru saw one of India's problems as its vast, idle labour force and put many to work building large-scale industrial complexes, from dams to steel factories.<sup>16</sup> Modernization, moderated by a desire to modernize on India's own terms (that is, guided neither by Euro–America nor the superpower of the USSR), was seen as a way for India to 'catch up' with the world. In addition, the climate of the 1950s suggested that this was possible, and possible soon. But by 1965, when *Waqt* was released, India had entered a new phase. Nehru's death in 1964 ended the 'optimism era', with the promises of Independence undelivered for many. The revival of Indian pride after the successes of the India–Pakistan war of 1965 did little to improve the day-to-day lives of most Indians. In this post-Nehruvian context, *Waqt* indirectly addresses topics difficult to discuss even two decades after Partition and allows for a certain catharsis in terms of the acknowledgement of the problematic hopefulness of the past.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to addressing the wound of Partition and the dashed hopes of post-Independence Indians, the film's second way of imaging this particular mid-1960s vision of Indianness is the multifaceted representation of what it means to be a modern Indian subject. Three brothers and the people around them negotiate post-Independence India against a backdrop of fabulous modern furniture. In a gender reversal of the earlier generation, we see Renu teaching Munnu to drive. The earthquake at the beginning of the film destroys the lives of those in that Mughal-colonial northern Indian town and thrusts them headfirst into this new modern era. Of course, they are thrown off-balance, only finding their moral centre and successfully navigating this new world when they are reunited as a family. As I will argue below, it is that familial bond, repeated throughout the film by framing the three brothers, the mother



and father in near-encounters prior to their final reunion, that shows the viewer how to navigate the modern Indian landscape. Only through a reliance on, and appreciation of, family can one truly survive modernity. That this vision of the modern subject is rather too neatly tied together stems from its Bollywood film context, understandably tinged with the melodramatic and the completeness of a happy ending. *Waqt*, then, in this neatly arranged package, allows the viewer to come to terms with the vicissitudes of time as it has played out since Independence, providing, in the end, a guarded optimism for the future even in light of the devastations and disappointments of the past.

With the Partition metaphor established as a central catalyst for the film, what does this mean for the understanding of Indian modernity that *Waqt* puts forth in its interior design, architecture and social relations? To address this question, one needs to examine how *Waqt* differs from earlier constructions of modernity in film, particularly as centred on the metropolis of Bombay. Films from a decade earlier portrayed a simple contrast between rural and urban, or then and now, that played into a Gandhian vision of village India prevalent in 1950s national modernization schemes. If the village represents a space of the 'true India', then these 1950s films ask how can one navigate the urban space, a space 'foreign' to this vision of traditional India? With *Waqt*, instead of trying to portray or even to retain or recoup a pure village 'Indianness', the film acknowledges the complexities of the *recent* past in its understanding of the modern. In other words, the Gandhian valorization of an authentic India within the village assumed a certain ahistorical, timeless village India, one relatively untouched by colonialism and 'the West'. This suggests one might go back and recoup a precolonial world in the postcolonial context. *Waqt* acknowledges that this space of the village is an idealized one, and in the film's negotiation of the postcolonial world, it situates the move to the urban as a consequence of world events and does not offer a clear space of return to that earlier life. Instead of presuming an ahistorical India, *Waqt* works through the traumas of the past, from the moment of Partition to the legacy of colonialism.

This allows *Waqt* to look at the city very differently from earlier films. Rather than the city representing something novel and foreign, it is taken as a 'given'. The question becomes how to navigate this urban, modern universe. The answer is to learn from history and not hubristically to assume what is to come. Many films of the 1950s found their tension in the contrast between the corruption and greed of the city and the innocence and purity of the village. Often, as in the case of *Do Bigha Zamin/Two Acres of Land* (Bimal Roy, 1953), the city (Calcutta in this case) figures as almost wholly evil, although the ideal village itself is disappearing at the hands of modern factory builders. In *Shree 420*, one of the quintessential examples of the mid-1950s urban–village story, the village is never shown, and the focus is on travel to the city and the urban itself.<sup>18</sup> *Shree 420*, like *Waqt*, depicts Bombay and complicates the

18 Sudipta Kaviraj, 'The culture of representative democracy', in Chatterjee (ed.), *Wages of Freedom*, p. 150; Christopher Pinney, 'Introduction: public, popular, and other cultures', in Christopher Pinney and Rachel Dwyer (eds), *Pleasure and the Nation* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 11; Dwyer and Patel, *Cinema India*, p. 63.



representation of the city as a source of evil. Discussing *Waqt* and *Shree 420* together provides an image of two different 'moderns' from two successive decades, both centred on a struggle to define the Indian modern city.

At the opening of *Shree 420*, we encounter the hero, Raj (Raj Kapoor), trying to hitch a ride on a road in the middle of nowhere. Having been passed by several vehicles, he feigns a fainting spell, lies across the road and causes the next car to screech to a halt, pick him up and attempt to take him to the hospital. He reveals his deception to the wealthy Bombayites in the car, only to get thrown back out on the highway. His moniker, Mr 420, derives both from the police label of a thief or scoundrel as a '420' and from the distance he is from Bombay when he is dropped off, 420 miles. He covers the distance while singing the iconic song of the film, *Mera Joota Hai Japani* (My Shoes are Japanese), and travelling with camel-trains, on an elephant and by foot. He thus quite literally sings and dances his way into Bombay, making the transition from an open, bucolic space into the hard-edged, busy world of the urban through a framing gate. We move from trees framing the image to this architectural edifice, and our hero struggles to navigate the swell of people and vehicles around him.<sup>19</sup>

19 Kaviraj, 'The culture of representative democracy', p. 151.

The narrative of the film continues to elaborate this space of Bombay, as he asks those around him to describe the people, culture and place he now enters. This scene parallels the scene in *Waqt* in which Raja transitions from boy to man and enters the space of the 'now'. Both mark the change from one space to another or one time to another, and as such they give us the crux of the tension for both films. In *Shree 420*, we follow Raj as he sings his way to the city. He is shot front-on during these scenes, and from below, giving him a proud presence on the screen, confident and in control. His final mode of conveyance on his journey is an elephant, and we watch him ride away into the horizon of an empty landscape, centred in the frame. As in the parallel scene in *Waqt*, the transition to the city is achieved through overlapping images, as the city fades in and the elephant fades out (figure 3). In *Shree 420*, this fading lasts several beats, and we see the buildings of the city, traffic jams and busy people walking among the cars. The first shot after the fade-in is of the back of a black car, framed by an archway that leads into the city (figure 4). This image visually echoes the rear of the elephant, suggesting that there might be a continuation from the earlier space. That hope is quickly abandoned as we watch Raj attempt to navigate the crowd: he wanders from person to person, trips over a cart and is almost hit by a car.

The visual replacement of the elephant with the car points, rather obviously, to the central tension of the film: village or rural life against the bustle and hard-edged cruelty of the city. Technological advances such as the car and cement are used here to represent the negative aspects of city life. After stumbling over several city-dwellers who push past him, Raj finally finds a beggar willing to talk with him. The beggar tells Raj that the only thing Bombayites see or hear is money. Raj asks him

Fig. 3.  
Riding an elephant into the city.  
*Shree 420/Mr 420* (Raj Kapoor,  
1955).



Fig. 4.  
Entering Bombay. *Shree 420/Mr*  
*420* (Raj Kapoor, 1955).



how to find work in the city and the beggar suggests begging for a living, explaining that despite all of Raj's qualifications (a diploma, honesty and willingness to work hard), the only way to get by in Bombay is to lie and cheat, and there are 420 ways to do that. In Bombay, the beggar says, 'Those high buildings are made of cement, and people have hearts of

stone'. Modern aspects of city dwelling are here equated with the heartlessness of the city-dweller, something Raj has just experienced first hand. From elephant to Ambassador car, politeness to rudeness, Raj has passed the threshold of 1950s urban space, ushered through by a beggar at the gate.

In *Waqt*, in contrast, the figure of Raja sprints headlong into the space of the modern, or, more precisely, is chased into it. In the scene that moves us from the aftermath of the earthquake to modern Bombay, the young Raja runs towards the camera and overlaps with his future self running away. In the next shot, he runs laterally, from right to left, now an adult. The context has completely and jarringly changed, and what joins the two spaces is the body of Raja himself and his action: running. Rather than a rural dirt road, we see him jumping from flat rooftop to flat rooftop, sprinting past high-rise buildings articulated by steel and primary colour patterns and racing through an empty modern stadium. Finally, he runs past a red convertible and into a large estate. The music for this sequence matches the visual speed and the contemporary mood, underlying the action with a snappy rhythm.

Raja physically takes us through the temporal and spatial transformation undergone by the family and the film. After the destruction of the old order, we find ourselves in a geometrically controlled rationality, marked by modern materials (steel), bright colours and right angles. Looking more carefully at this quick-cut sequence of spaces, we also see its barrenness. Raja is the only figure in all of these scenes, dashing through the cityscape. This hollowness is particularly poignant when Raja runs through the empty stadium seats (figure 5). The striking visual composition of the curved lines of the bleachers



Fig. 5.  
Raja (Raj Kumar) sprints through  
empty stadium seats. *Waqt/Time*  
(Yash Chopra, 1965).

provides an abstract pattern for him to cross, but their purpose as bleachers reminds us of his solitary status in this huge, overwhelming and cold modernist space. Our first glimpse of Bombay thus stands in utter contrast to the warm scenes in the older town shown in *Waqt*, in which family and friends greet one another before their storefronts and sing together in celebration of their familial relationships.

Furthermore, in contrast to Raj's entry into Bombay in *Shree 420*, in which he is disoriented by the crowds and jostling of the busy street, in *Waqt* we find modern Bombay to be a space of empty architecture, devoid of people and bustle. Here we see the first sign of the films' differing approaches to both the urban and the modern, a contrast that also belies their differing relations to history and the past. In the ten intervening years between *Shree 420* and *Waqt*, Bombay has changed. Initially it is a place foreign to the hero of the film – and, by extension, foreign to 'normal' Indians who come from the village. Those inside the city do not adhere to that norm: they are mean and selfish, characteristics blamed on their surroundings in the concrete urban space. A dichotomy between rural (good, friendly and normal) and urban (strange, bad and foreign) is set against a temporal and discursive dichotomy: traditional vs modern. But in *Waqt's* transition from then to now, the fallen hero's trajectory is not one of sprinting into a foreign, difficult space. He is at home in the modern (quite literally, as he runs to his residence) and while his running through the emptiness suggests a certain parallel void within the modern, it is not *foreignness* that we see displayed here, but rather *familiarity*. It is understood that modern urban space lacks the warmth found in close-knit village life, but the modern is not something new and strange; it is something exciting, a little threatening, but primarily an *a priori* space that the people of the 'now' inhabit. Rather than being contrasted with India's landscape and people, as it is in *Shree 420*, the modern here is accepted as an Indian modern.

After this crucial transition, the narrative of *Waqt* takes us through the journey of the three separated brothers as each of them explores his need for familial closeness in his own economic and social context. Raja not only reveals for us the modern city, but also shows us an element of his own personal situation: he runs because he is a thief, and his only friend is the wealthy crime boss, whose estate he enters at the end of the scene. We follow him in the film as he faces various moral challenges and we track him as he grows again into the generous person he used to be. In each stage, the city and its architecture provide a setting that underscores the modernity that the characters in the film must navigate. Both films articulate a particular understanding of how to be 'modern' or how to live in the city. The two distinct approaches underscore the difference between the films' portrayal of their hero's entry into the modern, with *Waqt* accepting the city as a given and *Shree 420* attempting to bring the village into the city. In part, this can be seen in the development of the central character in both films.

Like *Shree 420*, *Waqt* offers us the transformation of one character from generous and happy to corrupt and unhappy, and both, in the end, revert to some form of their earlier generous selves. In *Shree 420*, after pawning his 'honesty' – a medal he received from his orphanage back home – and having his money stolen, Raj wanders into a group of pavement dwellers. Here, one sees echoes of an initial altercation, in which he is buried in a pile of men, in his subsequent acceptance into the group, marked by a group embrace not unlike the earlier belligerent pile. As Ashis Nandy has argued regarding these early 1950s representations of the urban, here Raj finds a village-within-the-city, where food is shared, family bonds are recreated among strangers and a space is carved out not unlike a village square:

Kapoor is the ultimate street person, celebrating Bombay the way Woody Allen pays his reluctant, nervous homage to New York. Yet even in these films, the hero, while living by his wits off the street, turns the streets of Bombay into a friendly village neighborhood. . . . Raj Kapoor's Bombay, like R.K. Narayan's Malgudi, is also a tribute to a remembered village.<sup>20</sup>

This location of a village space within the city speaks to the difficulty in the 1950s of articulating the relationship between the image of the village and that of the metropolis. This relationship marks a denial of earlier depictions of city life as wholly dark and utterly bereft of meaning; it instead acknowledges the camaraderie among those struggling to live within the city.<sup>21</sup> Gandhi is often looked to as the figure who valorized the village as a central, constitutive element of India's identity; Nandy gives Satyajit Ray the credit for moving that village element into a filmic frame with *Pather Panchali* (1955).<sup>22</sup> In the Bollywood films of the 1950s, the tension between this iconic image of the rural, on the one hand, and the problematic space of the urban street dweller, on the other, plays out in melodramatic form. Over the course of *Shree 420*, Raj must navigate a complex environment of corruption and greed to regain his honesty – both literally by buying back the medal and figuratively by doing the right thing in the end. Bombay corrupts Raj and turns him away from his created village, and he almost cheats these same people out of their hard-earned money in a fraudulent housing scheme. After unmasking this fraud and turning in his corruptors, Raj sets off to leave the city, singing the opening song once again. His true love comes up behind him and he turns back to the city with her: the final scene of the film frames them at the top of the hill, looking out over the city lights.

*Shree 420* presents a message about balancing the village and the city, suggesting that one can retain one's honesty and purity in the face of the corrupt, dirty metropolis as long as one remembers to maintain village-like familial relationships with others in similar straits. As such, the film presents one of the central tensions of the urban in 1950s India. At once a place of incredible danger and a place of amazing wealth, the city

<sup>20</sup> Ashis Nandy, *An Ambiguous Journey to the City: the Village and Other Odd Ruins of the Self in the Indian Imagination* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 26.

<sup>21</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 39–44.

<sup>22</sup> Nandy, *An Ambiguous Journey*, p. 19.

23 Rashmi Varma, 'Provincializing the global city: from Bombay to Mumbai', *Social Text*, vol. 22, no. 4 (2004), p. 68.

24 Annapurna Shaw, 'The planning and development of New Bombay', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 33, no. 4 (1999), pp. 951–88; Charles Correa, *Housing and Urbanisation* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000); H.S. Verma, *Bombay, New Bombay and Metropolitan Region: Growth Processes and Planning Lessons* (Delhi: Concept Publishing House, 1985).

represents endless possibility for moving out of poverty. The hopefulness of the 1950s, linked to modernization and technological advance, is found in the vast potential of the city to increase the class status of those seeking their fortune there. In the early scenes of the film, however, this hopefulness is quickly challenged, as Raj's search for work turns up the message that work is not available and jobs are difficult to keep. Thus, a certain disillusionment with Nehruvian optimism is presented in the opening of *Shree 420*.

However, that tension is resolved in the end through reliance on the government. In the grandiose final scene, Raj suggests to the defrauded street dwellers that the government will help them to find housing – they only have to band together and ask. Kapoor himself considered his filmmaking part of the larger project of social advancement, nation-building and promoting faith in optimism embodied by the Nehruvian project.<sup>23</sup> Ending on this oratory and with the ambiguity of a departure and partial return over the hill, Kapoor gives us a picture of the ambivalent attitude towards the city found in 1950s India. If we find the village in the city, then it can be a happy place; if we merely pursue monetary gain, we lose the central element of 'Indianness' figured by the village. Nehru's modernization schemes may give us fancy things such as cars and concrete, but these only get in the way of happiness if we forget our humanity and our roots in (village) India.

In contrast, the modernity of the city in *Waqt* plays a more contextualizing role in the narrative. The tension is not about whether or not the city is a good place, but rather how to navigate this location with its cold, hard-edged, empty spaces. We shift from a question about whether or not we should even go to the city to a question of working within that already-given, accepted space of the modern. This contrast is crucial for understanding the shift from the 1950s to the 1960s in India and the nation's relation to modernity in these two different decades. By the 1960s, the population shift to the cities was taken as a given, and energies had refocused on the restructuring of cities in India so as to accommodate this influx of people. In Bombay, the architect Charles Correa and others proposed various improvement schemes in the mid 1960s, some of which were pursued later in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>24</sup>

Although some of the same tropes from the 1950s still occur in the 1960s – the coldness of the city, the corruption it can effect – this new modern city is one more comfortably inhabited. *Waqt* shows us the new Indian subject: one in synch with his or her surroundings, sprinting into the future, and able to move gracefully within a world of international fashion and style – and all without losing the link to one's family and the past.

This comfort with city-dwelling can be seen in a crucial scene in which Raja realizes that Ravi (Sunil Dutt) is in fact his long-lost younger brother Bablu. Raja has decided to assassinate Ravi so that he can claim Meena as his own. The scene opens on a flashing red neon sign reading 'murphy' in lower-case, separated script letters. A sheer curtain then



blocks the neon as we move inside to view a darkened bedroom with Ravi asleep on his low, minimalist bed next to various modern accoutrements, including a sleekly styled telephone. The only light in the scene comes from the flashing neon, casting the bedroom in an eerie half-light. This blinking neon continues to shape the scene as Raja steps into the light with a gun in his hand and the scene cuts between his face, the sleeping figure of Ravi, and the framed picture of Ravi as a child, which Raja finally recognizes. In that moment of recognition, the flashing speeds up slightly, as does the cutting between the camera angles, heightening the revelation, as Raja then moves closer to the bed. We hear his thoughts: '*Mera bhai, mera bhai*' ('my brother, my brother').

The 'murphy' sign references not only the brand name it represents – Murphy Radios – but also the modernity of the entire film itself. That Ravi, the sophisticated adopted son of a wealthy family, should have his own apartment in a commercial or industrial district with neon signs reveals his status as a modern, independent man. He lives in a rough, urban area (despite the interior furnishings of his room), one that intrudes constantly on his bedroom through this pulsating red light. The choice of the sign references a particular type of radio or television set from this UK-based company, one of the major manufacturers of this equipment until the 1960s. Indeed, in the 1960s, Murphy radios and televisions went into decline, as Japanese companies undercut the international market.<sup>25</sup> Murphy had recently changed its logo (in 1960) to a new, blockier font that reflected a more current style. Thus, the 'murphy' sign not only gives us an image of the modern, but also portrays a particular kind of modern already a bit 'retro' by the mid 1960s. The modern is a well-established concept by the time of *Waqf*. The neon sign, then, encapsulates the period that the film traverses, from pre-Independence (Murphy started using this logo just after World War II) to the mid 1960s. It also brings the urban space into the interior and marks that space as stylish, technological and international.<sup>26</sup>

The scene's importance lies in the way that the international modern setting surrounding the brothers plays off of the tension of the lost identity that causes Raja to attempt to kill his brother. The audience knows their familial relation, but the characters have forgotten because of the traumatic events of the past. Only by finding that connection once again can the tension be resolved, the past overcome, and the break of the earthquake/Partition healed. Only then can Raja and Ravi fully occupy a healthy, modern Indian subject position within the urban setting. Without that familial connection, the red glow of the neon sign only serves as another reminder of the modern city. With the familial connection, the murphy sign serves as a link to the past and to the international modern technological growth since Independence. Because Raja does not reveal his knowledge to Ravi until much later in the film, we are left with the image of Ravi sleeping in the room as the sign sheds partial, interrupted light through the window, indicating that the tension has not yet been fully resolved.

<sup>25</sup> John Sully, 'Classic wireless'. URL: <http://www.classicwireless.btinternet.co.uk/> [dated 2003; accessed 22 April 2005].

<sup>26</sup> David Grant, Murphy-bilia. URL: <http://www.murphy-radio.co.uk/murphybilia/index.html> [accessed 22 April 2005]. My sincere thanks to David Grant for his informative site and helpful comments.



27 For the family in Hindi cinema, see Patricia Ueberoi, 'The diaspora comes home: disciplining desire in DDLJ', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, vol. 32, no. 2 (1998), pp. 305–36 and her 'Imagining the family: an ethnography of viewing *Hum Aapke Hain Koun...*', in Rachel Dwyer and Christopher Pinney (eds), *Pleasure and the Nation: The History, Politics and Consumption of Public Culture in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 309–51. See also Jenny Sharpe, 'Gender, nation, and globalization in *Monsoon Wedding* and *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*', *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2005), pp. 58–81.

Family has become a running theme for many Bollywood films since the 1960s, and *Waqt* presages this direction with its star-studded cast and final scenes of reunion and celebration. If the 1950s saw individuals and their immediate families (wives, husbands, sons and daughters) struggling to make it in the big city or to keep their land in the village (*Do Bigha Zamin* [Bimal Roy, 1953] and *Mother India* [Mehboob Khan, 1957]), then the 1960s augurs a reconceptualization of Indianness away from the individual in the village to the extended family scattered throughout the city, subcontinent and globe.<sup>27</sup> *Waqt* shows us that shift within the Bollywood filmic landscape, one marked by the end of the Nehruvian era and the beginning of a new generation of politicians, filmmakers and filmgoers.

Both *Waqt* and *Shree 420* develop an image of the urban that connects to an evolving sensibility of the modern. *Shree 420* found a small piece of the village in the urban, thereby salvaging the cut-throat, destructive aspects of the big city and finding hope even within a portrait of vast economic and social inequalities. *Waqt* focuses instead on the fast-paced qualities of the urban (showing it empty of human interaction) and draws a picture of preserving family within the urban. Both films involve a recovery of something missing in the city environment. In the 1950s, this recovery meant bringing the village atmosphere into the street dwellers' lives; in the 1960s, it meant reclaiming a portion of pre-Independence hopefulness and familial closeness while acknowledging the history that the family (and by extension the nation) lived through. These two films map a shift from the village–city tension of the period immediately following Independence to an image of integrated, international modern life in the city during the 1960s. The urban operates as a fully formed character in *Shree 420*, shaping Raj's actions and pushing him towards corruption. In *Waqt*, it functions much more as a setting that cues the audience to the modernity of the film, making the point along the way that this modernity is only livable through the strength of familial bonds.

More than that, however, *Waqt* presents to us a relation to history and time that *Shree 420* does not. *Shree 420* attempts to cope with the 'now'. That is, its characters and narrative continually try to understand the new situations they are placed into. How can the bustling, anonymous city be navigated without losing one's humanity, one's central Indianness predicated on village life? Or, writ large, how can the nation, as it works to figure out its role in the world, produce a balance between the local and the international, and all without losing the sense of 'Indianness' so central to building a national imaginary?

In *Waqt*, these are no longer questions, not because they have been answered, but because their relevance has faded as the Indian nation established itself in the modern world. *Waqt* explores how we might understand the upheavals of the family and nation as part of that national fabric. The film engages with the wound of Partition and the subsequent splitting of families and regions into separate entities, a split that continues to result in wars, conflict and political tension. It presents a

hopeful, rich modernism that the viewer *already* inhabits, and it suggests that modernity can be made more human by resolving the inheritance of history and addressing the events of Partition. *Waqt* exists in a moment of post-Nehruvian Indian modern history when the direction of the nation was no longer clear, and the gains of Independence had, in many cases, not come to fruition. It narrates that earlier hope and hubris, its destruction in the fires of Partition and its filmic resolution in the reuniting of the family. Although the happy ending cannot as easily be produced outside the cinema, this film provides a means through which viewers might see a way of negotiating the nation's history and looking to the future once again. By providing an image – however fanciful and out of reach for most Indians – of a modern, urban lifestyle, *Waqt* produces one answer to the question of how to be modern and Indian at the same time, by bringing city, international style and family together at the end, acknowledging the mistakes of the past and eschewing hubris in the future.

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# Thinking outside the box: mediation of imaging and information in contemporary Chinese independent documentary

YINGJIN ZHANG

Film should no longer be the privilege of a minority; it originally belongs to the masses. . . . The spirit of amateurism embraces equality and justice, as well as a concern with human fate and compassion for ordinary people.

*Jia Zhangke on amateur filmmaking*

Perhaps it is because I'm honest and frank and never hid my purpose in shooting the film, or the idea behind it. And they [the informants] did the same. In other words, we finished our work by exchanging honesty.

*Ying Weiwei on The Box*<sup>1</sup>

The title of my essay, 'Thinking outside the box', is predicated on a number of metaphorical uses of the box in relation to contemporary Chinese independent documentary. *Hezi/The Box* (2001) is a documentary about the private life of a lesbian couple, and this first digital video production by Ying Weiwei is the principal filmic source in my study of the mediation of imaging and information in a transnational, cross-media context. The Box is also the name of a cafe located near Qinghua University in Beijing, noted for its occasional screenings of Chinese underground independent films and videos. This kind of unofficial practice is an encouragement to go beyond the boxed-in textual space and investigate the circulation and reception of contemporary Chinese documentary both at home and abroad. And the imperative of

<sup>1</sup> Jia Zhangke's quotation is taken from his article, 'Yeyu dianying shidai jijiang zaici daolai' ('The age of amateur filmmaking will return soon'), which was first published in *Nanfang zhoubao/Southern Weekend* in 1999 and widely circulated on Chinese websites. See Zhang Xianmin and Zhang Yaxuan, *Yigeren de yingxiang: DV wanquan shouce* (*All About DV: Works, Making, Creation, Comments*) (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 2003), p. 308. Ying Weiwei's quotation is taken from the 2002 Berlin International Film Festival's Programme for the Young Filmmakers' Forum. URL: [http://www.netlounge.tv/de/2002/e/DV-Filme/Ying\\_Weiwei/ying\\_weiwei.html](http://www.netlounge.tv/de/2002/e/DV-Filme/Ying_Weiwei/ying_weiwei.html) [accessed 10 August 2005].

‘thinking outside the box’ requires that we get out of our self-imposed disciplinary boxes and consider the mediating links between representation and reality, between imaging and information, between performance and emotion and between affect and agency.

I contend here that contemporary Chinese independent documentary functions as an unusual kind of information – unusual in that it is strictly censored at home by the mainstream state and commercial media while being welcomed and celebrated abroad for offering images of ‘truth’.<sup>2</sup> Although documentary film’s dual status as a medium of artistic expression and a means of recording reality has allowed Chinese independent documentarians consistently to stake claims to truth, the medium’s inherent tension between image and reality still remains troubling for the majority of Chinese documentarians and critics.

This claim to truth is most famously evidenced in the statement ‘my camera doesn’t lie’, which was used in 2003 as the title for a book on the new generation of ‘avant-garde’ filmmakers and also for a documentary film directed by Solveig Klassen and Katharina Schneidere-Roos, two German-speaking scholars then based in Beijing.<sup>3</sup> Once publicized, the statement quickly took on a tone of authority and authenticity. While the film did the rounds of international film festivals in Asia, Europe and North America, the book became one of the year’s best-selling film titles in China.<sup>4</sup> In lieu of watching these inaccessible, independently produced films, Chinese audiences seemingly chose to satisfy their curiosity by reading about them and accepting printed words and illustrations as an authorized source of information.

Nonetheless, and in spite of the manifesto-like ring to the title, neither the popularity of the book nor the interest in the documentary eased the tension between representation and reality. As Brian Winston notes, ever since John Grierson’s famous definition of documentary as ‘the creative treatment of actuality’, generations of documentarians have had to grapple with the contradiction of the form.<sup>5</sup> On the one hand, traditionally minded theorists have continued to insist on documentary’s assumed ontological proximity to reality, as exemplified by Michael Renov’s assertion that ‘every documentary issues a “truth claim” of a sort, positing a relationship to history which exceeds the analogical status of its fictional counterpart’.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, more radical critics have highlighted the construction and artificiality of documentary filmmaking and have proposed new ways to conceptualize truth, reality and authenticity, as illustrated by Stella Bruzzi’s pronouncement that ‘documentaries are performative acts whose truth comes into being only at the moment of filming’.<sup>7</sup>

In this context of competing concepts of truth and reality, a study of Chinese independent documentary as a *troubling case of information* can direct our attention to the complex issues involved in the production, circulation, exhibition and reception of documentary images. This case is troubling not only because certain types of intended information (about

2 See Chris Berry, ‘Hidden truths’, *Cinemaya*, nos 28–29 (1995), pp. 52–5.

3 Cheng Qingsong and Huang Ou, *Wode sheyingji bu sahuang: xianfeng dianying ren dang’an – shengyu 1961–1970 (My Camera Doesn’t Lie: Documents on Avant-Garde Filmmakers Born Between 1961 and 1970)* (Beijing: Zhongguo youyi chubans goingsi, 2002). Cheng and Huang’s book provides detailed information regarding the careers of eight male Chinese independent directors famous for their feature productions: Zhang Ming, Jiang Wen, Zhang Yuan, Wang Chao, Lu Xuechang, Lou Ye, Wang Xiaoshuai and Jia Zhangke. Klassen and Schneidere-Roos’s documentary features some of these directors and numerous other independents, such as women directors Li Yu and Emmy Tang.

4 Cheng Qingsong, *Kandejian de yingxiang (Films Permitted for Watching)* (Shanghai: Sanlian shudian, 2004), p. 272.

5 Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Griersonian Documentary and its Legitimations* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), pp. 11–4.

6 Michael Renov, ‘Re-thinking documentary: towards a taxonomy of mediation’, *Wide Angle*, vol. 8, nos 3/4 (1986).

7 Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary: a Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 7.

8 Compare 'pictures of poverty' and 'zones of privacy' in US documentary. See Paula Rabinowitz, *They Must Be Represented: the Politics of Documentary* (London: Verso, 1994).

9 See Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 95.

10 Richard Corliss, 'Bright lights', *Time Asia*, vol. 157, no. 12 (2001). URL: <http://www.time.com/time/asia/arts/magazine/0,9754,103002,00.html> [accessed 13 January 2006], my emphasis.

11 To quote from the journal's self-description: '*City Weekend* is published by Encyclopedia of China Publishing House with the support of its partner, Ringier Pacific Ltd. Ringier Pacific Ltd is the Asian Holding Company of Ringier AG (Switzerland), the leading provider of information and entertainment in Switzerland. With the country's largest daily newspaper, a highly successful business newspaper, and a colorful range of high circulation magazines, with television programs and Internet pages, Ringier continues to shape the future of media in Switzerland, Eastern Europe and Asia'. URL: [http://www.cityweekend.com.cn/en/beijing/about/about\\_us](http://www.cityweekend.com.cn/en/beijing/about/about_us) [accessed 16 August 2005].

subjects such as homosexuality, poverty or prostitution) may trouble, potentially challenge and even subvert age-old normative or normalizing concepts in Chinese culture and society,<sup>8</sup> but also because the status of images and information in Chinese independent documentary raises critical questions about interpretation, access, mediation, ethics, affect and agency.

Claiming to provide 'true' information, Chinese independent documentary takes as its primary responsibility the task of going beyond conventional media coverage to expose and explore sensitive 'news' or 'newsworthy' stories, thereby assuming a disruptive role similar to that of investigative journalism. Ironically, even when Chinese independent documentary deliberately avoids the use of authorial commentary (a mode similar to the Griersonian 'voice of god'),<sup>9</sup> the 'truth' status of its images and imaging in the age of transnational information flow is not confirmed by the officially sanctioned national media in China but is instead validated by the global media. On the one hand, then, this kind of 'true' information is routinely dismissed by China's mainstream media as ill-intended, interfering 'noise' – as misinformation or 'false' information whose author lacks authority or authorization – and is thus blocked from freely circulating within the country. On the other hand, it is precisely such censored information that is highlighted as the evidence of 'truth' overseas, where both international film festivals and global news media act as if they were the ultimate jury on its truth. Under this 'authoritative' global jurisdiction, 'instructions' about where, when and how to locate images of truth about contemporary Chinese life are unproblematically passed on to international audiences.

Take 'Bright lights', an article in *Time Asia* from 2001 in which the New York-based film critic Richard Corliss enthusiastically endorses underground Chinese directors and their fiction productions: 'The message may be simple, even brutal, but it is *authentic*. . . . They risk their career to deliver uncomfortable *truths*. If it is hard to find heroes in these movies, it is easy to see the *heroes behind* them.' Typically, for a western media pundit, Corliss cannot help but refer to 'the pernicious attention of government censors' operating in 'one of the world's most repressive systems'. With unwavering confidence, he concludes, 'Desperate circumstances create principled *outlaws*. The censors didn't intend this, but by their intransigence they helped spawn a *truly independent* film culture.'<sup>10</sup>

In turn, the assumed authority of overseas critics and commentators has influenced media coverage in China. One recent example is a feature article in *City Weekend*, an online entertainment journal in English subsidized by a multinational corporation and catering to an increasing number of expatriates working and living in Beijing and Shanghai.<sup>11</sup> Using the clichéd pun of 'reel' with 'real', the author opens with an assertion that 'China's DV handycam documentarians are producing a mosaic of images telling the story of a country in the throes of massive change', and then proceeds to interpret these images as 'reflecting the

12 He Chang, 'The raw and the reel', *City Weekend*, 3 August 2005. URL: [http://www.cityweekend.com.cn/en/beijing/features/2005\\_15/story.2005-08-01.9641876912](http://www.cityweekend.com.cn/en/beijing/features/2005_15/story.2005-08-01.9641876912) [accessed 5 August 2005], my emphasis. The three-day festival was originally planned to open at the Century Auditorium of Beijing University but had to move, under official pressure and at short notice, to a club named 'Plebian Film and Video Space' in the Chaoyang district, an area favoured by Chinese artists and foreign expatriates for its night life. The festival also screened films from Hong Kong and Taipei, as well as two French films at the French Embassy's Culture Centre in Beijing.

13 A director's note by Ying Weiwei and an interview with Zhang Yaxuan, a female film critic based in Beijing, can be found in Zhang and Zhang, *Yigeren de yingxiang*, pp. 126–40.

14 Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival website: URL: [http://www.city.yamagata.yamagata.jp/cgi-bin\\_01/fsearch-e.cgi?title=Box&director=Ying+Weiwei&country=China&year=&synopsis=](http://www.city.yamagata.yamagata.jp/cgi-bin_01/fsearch-e.cgi?title=Box&director=Ying+Weiwei&country=China&year=&synopsis=) [accessed 5 August 2005].

desire shared by many filmmakers to *capture* the raw and the real, bearing *witness* to the resilience of the human spirit as people struggle to triumph over adversity and make places for themselves in a world that dizzies with the speed of its transformation'. More specifically, the article cites *Renmian taohua/Beautiful Men* (Du Haibin, 2005), a documentary about the lives of a close-knit group of drag queen performers in Chengdu, Sichuan Province in south-west China, and interprets this reputed 'darling' of the Second Beijing Gay and Lesbian Film Festival held in April 2005 as a '*signal* that times are changing and the people on the margins of society are making inroads into the public sphere'.<sup>12</sup>

The choice of words such as 'capture', 'signal' and 'witness' assumes a correspondence between a documentary's images and its claim to truth. What is problematic in such journalistic coverage is the blind faith in the transparency of the medium, as if nothing is ever lost or added in the information flow from, for example, a documentary work to a news story to a reader/viewer. It is taking information at face value, as something with fixed content, instead of interrogating all its mediating processes, from its construction as words and images through its reproduction via technological means to its circulation and reception in concrete historical contexts.

Now a source of information itself, *The Box* started out as a documentary in search of a particular kind of information: the normally hidden lives of lesbians. Describing herself as 'absolutely straight', Ying, a state-employed television programme director from Shenyang, Liaoning Province in north-east China, conceived the project in early 2001 but had trouble finding appropriate subjects until she posted a message on the internet.<sup>13</sup> E-mail responses came immediately, some from as far afield as South China, and Ying decided to focus on two lesbian artists. She borrowed a Sony DS99 DV camera, bought fifteen tape cassettes and travelled to a faraway city. The couple met her at the gate of a university and brought her by bicycle to their apartment, where half an hour later she began filming the intimate life of these two total strangers. Her week with them resulted in the documentary, details of which can be found online at the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival website in Japan:

'A' is a painter and 'B' is a singer. They are lesbians who live together peacefully, building up a world between them that is both pure and beautiful, and closed and vulnerable. The director touches upon their emotional experiences, reflecting many complex factors behind homosexuality relevant to sociology, psychology, ethics and more.<sup>14</sup>

Like many contemporary Chinese independent documentaries, *The Box* opens with an extended sequence of talking-head interviews, in which Wang Fang (the painter) and Liu Liang (the singer) take turns speaking directly to the camera and narrating their personal experiences, such as lack of parental affection and disgust with heterosexual love,

15 To quote one observation: since the early 1990s, 'the endless and still long takes, in which "nothing happens" . . . have become fashionable among independent filmmakers [in China], following the international acclaim of filmmakers like Taiwan's Hou Hsiao-hsien'. See Chris Berry, 'The sacred, the profane, and the domestic in Cui Zi'en's cinema', *Positions*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2004), p. 198. For a detailed analysis of Hou's cinematic style, see James Udden, 'Hou Hsiao-hsien and the question of a Chinese style', *Asian Cinema*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2002), pp. 54–75.

anger at sexual harassment and despair over an abortion. Unlike most of its counterparts, *The Box* shows this initial sequence in black and white, as if to intensify the sombre tone in which Wang and Liu describe their lives before they found each other.

An intertitle in both Chinese and English announces, 'On Mooncake Festival of 2000, Wang Fang and Liu Liang got to know each other through internet', and scenes of their intimate everyday life are then rendered in full colour. In a sequence of about twelve minutes, the two of them are seen naked from the waist up, engaged in daily tasks such as brushing their teeth, combing their hair, putting in contact lenses and watering pot plants by the window, beyond which the traffic noise reinforces the actuality of the scene. The sequence is captured in long takes, similar to Hou Hsiao-hsien's signature style, with a stationary camera and a few fixed frames.<sup>15</sup> A brief shot of Wang and Liu hugging each other after work is followed by another sequence of roughly seven minutes. Again naked except for their pants, this time the two women are seen acting childishly in the bedroom, first chasing around and wrestling, then touching each other's faces to the soundtrack of a piano concerto and chamber music.

Another intertitle, 'Once between us there was a woman called X', brings a second round of talking heads, this time in colour. Focusing on a recent disruptive episode in their lives, the sequence is marked by two changes. First, Wang looks sideways while speaking, as if literally to turn away from the unhappy memory, for she admits collapsing when Liu considered leaving her for 'X'. Second, this is the only time in the film that the director's voice is heard offscreen, asking, 'Is she [Liu] your first partner? You haven't had anyone before, right?' – to which Wang answers affirmatively. The telephone rings while Liu explains that her motivation back then was sympathy for a middle-aged woman, for whom she would subsequently find a partner, a successful white-collar worker, via the internet.

The film lapses into black and white again for a sequence seven minutes long, in which Liu is quarrelling with 'X' over the phone. Wang walks out of the bathroom and, in a couple of rare shots, pokes her finger at the camera and stares right at it, in extreme closeup. The colour returns when Liu, again in talking-head mode, rationalizes her breakup with 'X' after six months of uncertainty. After another domestic scene of Wang painting and Liu playing guitar, the two are seen for the first time outside the apartment, near the courtyard car park, in a restaurant and in an office-like setting, apparently getting over a fight between them. Significantly, even in public, they are entirely absorbed in their own world – an intimate kind of absorption further demonstrated in the next two scenes. In the first, Liu is admiring Wang in a beautiful red skirt, and the camera assumes a voyeuristic gaze. In the second, Liu and Wang take showers in turn, completely ignoring the presence of the camera.

Such is the 'naked truth' about the private life of this lesbian couple that Ying presents. Yet, as Ying insists, the film's graphic nudity has no



16 The director also admits that she has cut the footage of the couple's interaction with their families and friends because these scenes were considered irrelevant. See Anonymous author, 'Zigong li de feixiang' ('Flying in the womb'). URL: [http://www.bjmdc.com/xunyicao/new\\_page\\_32.htm](http://www.bjmdc.com/xunyicao/new_page_32.htm) [accessed 16 August 2005].

17 See Zhang and Zhang, *Yigeren de yingxiang*, pp. 129–39.

18 An anonymous author observes in 'Zigong li de feixiang', an article published on a Chinese website for homosexuals: 'The metaphor of the 'box' refers precisely to a womb-like space. It is enclosed, warm and protective of a fragile life flying freely therein. But at the same time this space exhibits a glass-like quality, easy to break into and break in pieces'. See fn. 17.

particular significance because it was the couple's 'natural' and 'truthful' condition during the summer: they lived like that when it was hot in the apartment, and they trusted Ying enough after three days to let her film them unclothed. Still, it is worth pointing out that the information contained in the film is by no means unadulterated, for the shifts from black and white to colour and back already foreground the mediation, as does the use of intertitles. Ying admits in an interview that she deliberately avoided filming the couple's discussion of sex because she believed at the time that their relationship's 'spirituality' outweighed its sexuality.<sup>16</sup> In order to capture the 'pure beauty' of the couple's world, which exhibits a kind of 'poetry' that moved her to tears on the fourth day of shooting, Ying believes she has invested much of her emotion in 'every single shot'.<sup>17</sup>

The director's emotional investment is most visible in the film's final sequence, in which the couple, sitting on their bed half-naked, talk about their creative writing. Wang's work moves people to tears, Liu comments, and she proceeds to read from Wang's writing:

Those dead and alive, are you still awake?  
If so, please listen to me . . .  
My body is wet and warm,  
Clearly keeps the temperature exact  
Neither too cold nor too hot  
Not trouble me the least . . .  
Years have passed. It still keeps its figures unchanged.  
How moving it is!  
Man's will is no stronger than body  
It is easy for you to tell.  
Even one freed from worldly cares  
Just manages to live like a running flesh . . .

Bathed in a warm light, Wang listens to Liu's recitation with a curious, sad look. Wang proceeds to read a piece of her own writing, in which she imagines her prenatal existence in her mother's womb, her yet-unknown gender and her anticipation of maternal love: 'Then I flew away; the hell looked so beautiful'. Wang spreads her arms apart on the bed and looks up at the camera, her voice echoing as if from a faraway place, and her look directing the viewer beyond the confines of their boxed-in, 'womb-like' space of existence.<sup>18</sup>

It is obvious that the documentary information in *The Box* is mediated through human emotions and bodily movements. Ying's intention, published on the Berlin Film Festival's website, is worth quoting in full:

I'll never forget the feeling at the first sight of them: shock. The shock came from their eyes: A looked a bit away, showing her long self-seclusion; in B's eyes there was something lonely. They stood there in the morning sun, with the noisy street behind them and the bright

campus in front. Yet they weren't associated with all of this; they were far away from the world, as if living on an island. Afterwards, many people asked me how I was able to have that deep understanding of them in such short time. Perhaps it is because I'm honest and frank and never hid my purpose in shooting the film, or the idea behind it. And they did the same. In other words, we finished our work by exchanging honesty. What most attracted me in the film is that I could experience different lives with different persons as a recorder and witness. The process of recording is the one of understanding their lives, as if I had lived like an actress, but always as an outsider. I did not know what would happen next. It was the improvisation that made me excited.

Understandably, to intensify the affective dimension, *theatricality* is built into the structure of visual evidence, while the performance itself sometimes takes on the status of the evidential, of something that both demonstrates through the embodiment of the otherwise unrepresentable and compels through revelatory bodily movements. Significantly, even the director characterizes her role as 'an actress', 'a recorder and witness' as she seeks to 'experience different lives with different persons'. By virtue of the *performativity on both sides*, affect is intensified in moments of revelation – moments that make something take place in front of the candid camera, bringing forth the unspeakable and setting it in place as visual evidence.

On the other hand, by virtue of the performative, affect may accomplish a concurrent act of concealment or subversion in driving the conventional out of sight. Thus, in *The Box*, the heterosexual world is deliberately bracketed off from the imagetrack: its ghostly presence as a verbal reference is only substantiated by the brief appearance of a few men riding bicycles past the couple in the courtyard. In a sense, the film's heightened theatricality has created what Foucault would call a 'heterotopia', a place without place (a place existing in the non-place of acting, in the acting that lacks a physical place),<sup>19</sup> a space in which truth can be hinted at by gestures, information obtained through tropes of embodiment and affect appreciated in nuanced details of motions and emotions.

Sure enough, a 'performative impulse' has duly been attributed to recent Chinese documentary to refer to works that involve performances, such as *Bi an/The Other Bank* (Jiang Yue, 1995), or contain explicit theatricality, like *Fengkuang Yingyu/Crazy English* (Zhang Yuan, 1999).<sup>20</sup> Yet performativity can exist in a more subtle way. Bill Nichols's characterization of Euro-US performative documentary may be borrowed to foreground the affective dimensions of *The Box*: 'The shift of emphasis toward the poetic, expressive and rhetorical also reconfigures questions of validation. . . . Our assessment and engagement, then, is "less in terms of [the message's] clarity or its truth value with respect to its referent than in terms of its performance force". . . . We are what such films refer to.'<sup>21</sup> The performative, in other words, demands the viewers' immediate response in the key moments of

19 Michel Foucault, 'Of other spaces', *Diacritics*, vol. 16, no. 1 (1986), pp. 22–7.

20 Charles Leary, 'Performing the documentary, or making it to the other bank', *Senses of Cinema*, no. 27 (2003). URL: [http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/03/27/performing\\_documentary.html](http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/03/27/performing_documentary.html) [accessed 23 July 2005].

21 Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries*, pp. 99–100.

22 Ibid., p. 102.

23 See the Berlin website listed in fn 1.

24 Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, p. 155.

25 Samuel Weber, 'Displacing the body: the question of digital democracy', p. 11, published 2 May 1996. URL: <http://www.hydra.umn.edu/weber/displace.html> [accessed 27 January 2005].

26 Zhang and Zhang, *Yigeren de yingxiang*, p. 140. Jia Zhangke identifies the DV camera's 'extremely' attractive factors, such as its low demand on lighting, its small size, its easy handling and its low budget – all of these promising the emergence of a new film aesthetic. Ibid., p. 311.

encounter, and this response opens up a third realm of performance in addition to those of informants and documentarians.

'Performative documentary ... gives priority to the affective dimensions struck up between ourselves and the text', observes Nichols, and his statement that this new documentary mode 'proposes a way of being-in-the-world as this world is itself brought into being through the very act of comprehension'<sup>22</sup> nicely captures the directorial intention of *The Box*: 'The process of recording is the one of understanding their lives'.<sup>23</sup> Ying shot her documentary in order to bring the taboo out into the open and help her viewers to understand the 'secret' lesbian world. *The Box* can be said to have both 'named' and 'performed' that world for the viewer, and this *simultaneity of naming and performing* is precisely the new concept of 'performance' that Bruzzi wants to introduce to the theorization of performative documentary.

'Documentaries, like Austin's performatives, perform the actions they name'<sup>24</sup> – actions of documenting and recording, which inevitably involve subjects, filmmakers, the apparatus and spectators.

The presence of the filming apparatus suggests that, apart from human performances, a less visible link between performativity and technology deserves our further attention. For Samuel Weber, the etymological and semantic richness of the word 'digit' (from the Latin *digitus* meaning 'finger') points to the connection between digital information and theatricality itself as technology:

The hand is the organ of grasping, of appropriation, of perception and conception, of seizing and of controlling. The finger, by contrast, is that of *pointing* and of *touching*. At the periphery of the body, the finger points us elsewhere. In so pointing, it gestures not simply beyond the confines of the individual body as a self-contained whole, but, more radically, beyond the confines of place as such, which is to say, of place as the unmovable container or field required for objects of perception and of consciousness to *take place*. In pointing, the finger touches the other, or at least a certain exteriority. It can also in so doing try to put the other in its place.<sup>25</sup>

To put it differently: by means of 'pointing' or 'gesturing' at the fragments of the existential world rather than 'grasping' the imagined totality, elusive truth or hidden information may 'take place' as embodied images on screen and be put in place as visual evidence. In Ying's case, digital technology has enabled her to 'put the other in place' and to 'touch upon their emotional experiences'; it has also pointed her to a new place where she has successfully discovered a 'personal' mode of expression in an otherwise male-dominated profession. Hence it could be that technologically, if not ideologically, DV has bought 'liberation' to female media workers in China.<sup>26</sup>

Interestingly, *The Box* illustrates Weber's theorization of the gesture as 'a bodily movement that interrupts and suspends the intentional-teleological-narrative movement towards a meaningful goal, thus

27 Weber, 'Displacing the body', p. 9.

28 Lesley Stern, 'Ghosting: the performance and migration of cinematic gesture, focusing on Hou Hsiao-hsien's *Good Men, Good Women*' (Unpublished manuscript).

29 Ibid.

30 Zhang and Zhang, *Yigeren de yingxiang*, p. 124.

31 'Chinese Underground Film Festival', University of California-San Diego, 8–10 October 2003. URL: <http://cuff.ucsd.edu> [accessed 10 August 2005]; 'Chinese Underground Film Festival at Cornell', Cornell University, 12–16 March 2004. URL: [http://www.einaudi.cornell.edu/eastasia/calendar/chinese\\_film.asp](http://www.einaudi.cornell.edu/eastasia/calendar/chinese_film.asp) [accessed 12 January 2006].

32 The closing events, which included the screening of Jia Zhangke's epic feature *Platform* (2000) and the awards ceremony, were relocated to a suburban open-air theatre after the authorities heard about the unofficial film festival and ordered the BFA to close its campus venue. See Cheng, *Kandejian*, pp. 243–6. Another source identifies the Beijing University Online (*Beida zaixian*) as another sponsor of the festival: see Zhang and Zhang, *Yigeren de yingxiang*, pp. 272–4, 301–2. The Practice Society is an unofficial discussion group headed by Yang Zi and composed largely of BFA students and recent graduates; discussion concentrates on film classics. See Wang Weici, *Jilu yu tansuo: 1990–2000 dalu jilupian de fazhan yu koushu jilu* (Documentation and Exploration: The Growth of Documentary in Mainland China and its Related Oral Histories, 1990–2000) (Taipei: Guojian dianying ziliao guan, 2001), p. 102.

opening up a different kind of space'.<sup>27</sup> In turn, Weber's theory of gesturing dovetails with what Lesley Stern hypothesizes as a type of 'cinematic gesturing' that moves the viewer in a kinetic, sensorial and visceral manner. 'The film works (like a dream "works") as a patterning of doubles, mimicry, repetitions, [and] returns', Stern writes of *Haonan haonü/Good Men, Good Women* (Hou Hsiao-hsien, 1995). '[T]his is a film propelled by movement – filmic and bodily movement, mechanical and pathetic, movement to and fro between past and present, here and there'.<sup>28</sup>

That which Stern locates in Hou's film as 'a circuit of energy that passes through actants, gestures that mobilize bodies, affects that travel between bodies on the screen and bodies in the audience',<sup>29</sup> is also present in *The Box*, in part because of its 'imitation' of Hou's style of long-takes mentioned above. In *The Box*, cinematic gesturing works in tandem with performativity in the moment when Wang's face looms large in front of the camera. The monotone of Liu's telephone quarrel with X is de-referenced, and the viewer is forced into silent, face-to-face communication with Wang. Her fingering of the camera lens indicates simultaneously her curiosity at this enabling technology and her sadness at her inability to articulate herself fully. Indeed, the cinematic technology further enables the viewer to see an extreme closeup of Wang's iris, which hides nothing from view but highlights something unfathomable – a touch of profound sadness behind an act of pure curiosity. Here is a classic example of cinematic gesturing – one in which the viewer is kinetically moved closer to the screen, emotionally touched in a poetic ambience of affect and imaginatively pointed to a space beyond the confines of a self-contained world.

As *The Box* demonstrates, Chinese independent documentary is increasingly reliant on digital production and reproduction. Through technological transmutation and transmission, Chinese documentary images transcend conventional spatiotemporal limits and deliver information otherwise inaccessible through the mainstream information system. Many of these works are shot by DV camera, which not only enhances the documentarians' mobility and reduces the costs of independent production but also facilitates circulation within and across national borders.

*The Box* was exhibited in 2002 at the prestigious Berlin International Film Festival, at a 'visual truth' film festival in Switzerland, and at festivals in Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea.<sup>30</sup> Since then, it has travelled to France, the Netherlands and the USA, where it was presented on campuses including University of California-San Diego in October 2003 and Cornell University in March 2004.<sup>31</sup> *The Box* also received critical acclaim inside China. The film was originally produced for entry into a nationwide competition at 'The First Unrestricted New Image Festival' organized by *Nanfang zhoumo/Southern Weekend* in Guangzhou, the Directing Department of the Beijing Film Academy (BFA) and the Practice Society (*Shijian she*) in Beijing, held at the BFA in September 2001.<sup>32</sup> This unprecedented, unofficial event showcased

33 See Cheng, *Kandejian*, pp. 242–5.

34 For example, *Box Cafe* screened *Choujue dengchang/Enter the Clowns* (2001), a queer film by Cui Zi'en, a high-profile gay director in China. See Qi Wang, 'The ruin is already a new outcome: an interview with Cui Zi'en', *Positions*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2004), p. 192.

35 'Documentary Power' is a non-governmental organization established in Hong Kong in 1989, headed by Zheng Zhixiong and devoted to documenting images of popular social movements. See Zheng Wei, 'He' zhong de rizi' ('Days spent in Box Cafe'), *Dushu*, no. 6 (2003), p. 106.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 109.

37 Persistent censorship in China has had an even more dismal outcome – irrevocable destruction of information. Film critic Zhang Xianmin has drawn attention to the hundreds of pre-1949 films that have been destroyed and the thousands more that are stored in a bunker deep inside the mountains of Shaanxi province in mid-west China. The first systematic destruction of early films took place right after the liberation of Shanghai in 1949, when the government was eager to get rid of 'cultural trash' confiscated from the private sectors; the second large-scale destruction occurred in the early 1960s, when reels of films were burned to extract rare elements required for military buildup and national defence. Destruction is an ever-present threat for contemporary independent films as many exist only in a single copy, which even then might not be in the director's possession. See Zhang Xianmin, *Kanbujian de yingxiang (Films Banned from Watching)* (Shanghai: Sanlian shidian, 2004), pp. 155–61.

independent productions in fictional, experimental and documentary categories, and *The Box* proved a huge success. The film critic Cheng Qingsong (b. 1968), a juror at the festival, considered *The Box* to be the best out of forty-seven competition entries and regretted that it was pipped by just one vote to first prize in the documentary competition by *Tielu yanxian/Along the Railroad* (Du Haibin, 2000), a film about homeless people. Cheng's comment is worth quoting: '*The Box* is ambitious. Truth alone is not sufficient for it, nor is objectivity itself. Merely recording the flows of life is insufficient, either. The film tries to use the camera to reach the spiritual world of two women falling in love and living together.' In comparison to *The Box*, Cheng judges *Chunguang zhaxie/Happy Together* (1997), the internationally acclaimed Hong Kong feature film on gay sexuality that landed Wong Kar-Wai (Wang Jiawei) the best director award at the 1997 Cannes International Film Festival, to be merely 'insubstantial and hypocritical'.<sup>33</sup>

From Beijing, *The Box* went on to be screened at other small-scale, unofficial film events in China, such as 'The Shanghai Exhibit of Unofficial Films'. Apart from film festivals and exhibitions, many cafes, bars and art galleries in the major cities also provide unofficial access to Chinese independent documentaries. Located on the ground floor of a residential apartment building a few streets from the East Gate of Qinghua University in Beijing, Box Cafe is one such, although its main business is to serve drinks and provide a space for customers to browse books and magazines.<sup>34</sup>

In October 2002, the cafe hosted a documentary series in its small venue with space for a projection screen and around twenty seats. While recent works by the Hong Kong group 'Documentary Power' left a favourable impression, several mainland Chinese documentaries, including *Gonggong changsuo/In Public* (Jia Zhangke, 2001), which had won the top prize at the 2002 Marseille International Documentary Film Festival, were either booed or challenged by the audience.<sup>35</sup> Despite its length, *Jiang Hu/Life on the Road* (Wu Wenguang, 1999) saved the day and concluded the documentary event. Walking out of Box Cafe, one critic recalled a sentence a previous visitor had written in the Cafe Diaries: 'The box is a space for imagination, not a harbour for escaping a storm'.<sup>36</sup>

Unfortunately, even as a space for imagination, Box Cafe is not safe from state control. It was soon banned from 'illegal' exhibitions on its premises, although it still carries flyers for similar events elsewhere in the city. The persistence of official censorship proves that the most urgent problem for Chinese independent documentary is not so much its status as evidence of 'truth' as facilitating access to such truth or information.<sup>37</sup> Censored as 'noise' by the national information system and suppressed as troubling information by state censorship, images from Chinese independent documentary flow freely only through venues overseas, and such unofficial 'overflows', beyond the legal confinements in China, are

frequently denounced as illegal by Chinese authorities: they are produced underground at home and independently distributed and exhibited abroad. Without state permits, such films are in violation of domestic legal codes and regulations.

While international audiences for the price of a ticket have 'free' access to Chinese documentary images, Chinese audiences may actually resort to piracy as an unconventional but extremely popular means of accessing the same images free of charge. Piracy in this case is not a premeditated violation of the author's intellectual property rights, for many independent documentarians fully intend to distribute their works for free through unofficial channels, such as video reproduction and internet uploading.<sup>38</sup> Rather, piracy here constitutes an act of defiance against the increasingly commercial nature of Chinese media operations, which dictates that sensitive political topics be avoided, primarily for financial reasons.

Piracy is thus a tactic of survival, appropriation and potential intervention of the weak (if not exactly the powerless) in the context of the hegemonic, intertwined powers of the state and transnational capitalism. In Michel de Certeau's words:

It takes advantage of 'opportunities' and depends on them. . . . [It] must accept the chance offerings of the moment. . . . It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse.<sup>39</sup>

One such 'surprise' is a hitherto unforeseen trajectory of filmmaking in China – 'from piracy to democracy' – a trajectory made possible by the newly available digital technology and enthusiastically celebrated by independent directors such as Jia Zhangke. For Jia, the wide circulation of inexpensive pirated VCDs since the mid 1990s has empowered ordinary consumers, previously denied access to international film classics, to reclaim their rights to watch films otherwise classified only 'for internal use'.<sup>40</sup> To use de Certeau's metaphor, Chinese piracy has 'poached' in the cracks of the authoritarian monopoly of film resources.<sup>41</sup>

For Jia, the 'democracy' of film watching made possible by piracy promises an emergent democracy of 'amateur filmmaking' made possible by digital technology. Citing Jean-Luc Godard, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Quentin Tarantino and Ogawa Shinsuke as stellar examples from the past, Jia anticipates a democratic future: the second coming of independent filmmaking:

Their modes of filmmaking are always full of surprises, but their emotional investment always fall into solid places. They do not care about the so-called professional procedures, so they discover more possibilities of innovation. They reject the fixed standards of the trade and are therefore able to underscore multiple concepts and values.<sup>42</sup>

38 A DVD series of Chinese independent documentaries recently circulated in the Chinese piracy market includes *Liulang Beijing/Bumming in Beijing* (Wu Wenguang, 1990), *Old Men* (Yang Tianyi, 1999) and *Qunzhong yanyuan/Extras* (Zhu Chuanming, 2001).

39 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), p. 37.

40 In the mid 1990s, a pirated VCD cost about 25 RMB, but prices dropped to as low as 5–10 RMB by the mid 2000s, depending on the city of purchase. In comparison, ticket prices for a cinema cost about 20 RMB in the mid 1990s and were as high as 80 RMB in the mid 2000s. The exchange rate was pegged at 8.3 RMB to US\$1 until August 2005, when RMB started to float within limited margins.

41 Also using de Certeau to make sense of piracy in China, Laikwan Pang nonetheless sees no consequent prospect of democracy or empowerment for Chinese consumers: 'Obviously, it is naive to assume that piracy is an egalitarian effort of the people to oppose some authoritative policy, because what the people desire is entertainment in the form of commercial Hong Kong and Hollywood films, which are hegemonic in their own discursive structure'. See Laikwan Pang, 'Piracy/privacy: the despair of cinema and collectivity in China', *Boundary 2*, vol. 31, no. 3 (2004), p. 115. Pang's pessimism reflects her failure to see the multiplicity of pirating practices.

42 Zhang and Zhang, *Yigeren de yingxiang*, p. 307.



43 Ibid., p. 308.

44 Lin Xudong, Zhang Yaxuan and Gu Zheng (eds), *Jia Zhangke dianying: guxiang sanbuqu zhi 'Ren Xiaoyao'* (*Jia Zhangke's Films: Hometown Trilogy, Unknown Pleasures*) (Beijing: Mangwen chubanshe, 2003), p. 6.

45 See Yingjin Zhang, 'Styles, subjects, and special points of view: a study of contemporary Chinese independent documentary', *New Cinemas*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2004), pp. 119–35.

46 One recent case is *Extras*, which deals with a group of extras waiting outside the Beijing Film Studio in anticipation of landing screen roles that might eventually make them famous. After winning an award at the Hong Kong International Film Festival, the film has triggered a debate on the documentary ethic: its candid sexual talk has been criticized as 'fascist' and its director accused of 'violating' his informants. Such reputed 'violation' became a selling point, and in fact the Chinese VCD cover advertises the film as forbidden to viewers younger than eighteen years old.

Undoubtedly, *The Box* is an outcome of such amateur filmmaking, exemplifying what Jia characterizes as 'the spirit of amateurism': to 'embrace equality and justice, as well as a concern with human fate and compassion for ordinary people'.<sup>43</sup> A 'surprise' to the world of Chinese documentary from a first-time amateur filmmaker, Ying's documentary echoes the notion of 'surprise' in de Certeau's theorization of weak power and realizes Jia's anticipation of democratic filmmaking. For Jia as for Ying, digital technology promises a 'democratizing', 'liberatory' or even 'revolutionary, subversive' prospect in the changing mediascape of contemporary China.<sup>44</sup>

Jia's elaboration of alternative modes of filmmaking returns our attention to the issue of mediation in documentary. Intended as information, Chinese independent documentary images strive to capture and reproduce a semblance of transparency and immediacy, achieved by means of minimal authorial manipulation, reflected, for example, in the recurring tropes of talking-head interviews, natural lighting, location sound, shaky camera and grainy images.<sup>45</sup> Watching such a documentary work, the viewer is given the impression of entering the presentness of 'here and now' and staying 'on the scene', in the actuality of unfolding events, which seem to communicate directly, as if unmediated, to the viewer. Nonetheless, under scrutiny, this semblance of transparency and immediacy barely conceals the fact of mediation.

Mediation under discussion here may occur at three levels: between author and subject, subject and image, image and technology. The first level involves the documentarian's selection of topics and subjects, a selection-cum-mediation that inescapably touches on the issue of documentary ethics. The second level, which involves subjects and their images, simultaneously foregrounds the product of truth–reality and a measure of performativity necessary for such truth–reality to 'take place' literally in front of the camera. The third level of mediation involves documentary images and their transformation or transmutation through technology, a process in which images are inevitably dislocated and relocated in different registers of time and space.

Produced as pre-censored information, Chinese independent documentary challenges the mainstream media by consistently exploring sensitive sociocultural topics – topics given value more often as news than as arts. These topics regularly touch on certain concealed aspects of private life, so the question of ethics arises when 'privacy' is reproduced as voluntarily disclosed images for 'public' viewing. Indeed, it is often through the 'naked truth' of marginal or marginalized people that independent documentary filmmakers achieve a measure of publicity for themselves. Equally ironic is that privacy can only obtain the status of truth when it enters into public circulation. The ethics question here is who benefits from such media publicity?<sup>46</sup> Information is extracted from the informant, but it is the documentarian who may now secure public recognition. The informant will only fade into a shadowy background, if not into utter oblivion.



47 Fenghuang weishi (Phoenix Satellite TV) (ed.), *DV xin shidai 1* (*DV New Generation 1*) (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 2003), pp. 258–9. *Old Men* received awards at several international documentary film festivals in Japan, France and Germany; its French television rights were sold for Fr120,000 – a rare commercial success in Chinese independent documentary. See Wang Weici, *Jilu yu tansuo*, p. 166.

48 Lü Xinyu, *Jilu Zhongguo: dangdai Zhongguo xin jilu yundong* (*Documenting China: the New Documentary Movement in Contemporary China*) (Beijing: Sanlian shidian, 2003), pp. 209–10.

49 See the anonymous author in fn 17. For further discussions of the 'documentary of cruelty' and subject exploitation, see Yiman Wang, 'The amateur's lightning rod: DV documentary in postsocialist China', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 58, no. 4 (2005), pp. 20–4; Yingjin Zhang, 'Styles', pp. 127–8.

50 For further elaboration, see Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

Documentary's innate ability to violate privacy by rendering it public has troubled at least three female Chinese independent documentarians, who are all aware that in the process of producing and circulating such information, privacy is volunteered by the informant (as a subject rarely endowed with subjectivity), while publicity is always granted to the documentarian (as a conscientious 'agent' in full possession of subjectivity). Yang Tianyi (Yang Lina), whose *Laotou/Old Men* (1999) had taken two-and-a-half years to shoot and another six months to edit, felt troubled by a feeling of guilt after the film received awards and she became famous: 'The old men are still sitting outside their houses, but I feel like a thief – having stolen from them just to dress myself up'.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Li Hong admits that documentary is a 'brutal' method, and her *Huidao Fenghuangqiao/Out of Phoenix Bridge* (1997) constitutes an act of 'looting' the privacy of 'migrant workers' by the city dweller; in short, she directed the film for herself, not for her informants who had travelled from Anhui province in central China to work in Beijing.<sup>48</sup>

Although she does not express such feelings of guilt as intensely as Yang Lina and Li Hong, Ying concedes that shooting *The Box* was a 'painful' process for her. She constantly felt troubled or even 'tortured' by her unsettled identity on location: 'Was I a director? A recorder? A listener? A witness? Or their friend?' The friendship she established with her informants has given her some comfort, but she cannot but feel 'sentimental' because she knows all too well that she has no control of what will happen to that beautiful but fragile world captured in *The Box*. 'This is exactly what makes a documentary cruel', she admits, 'it is simply too real'.<sup>49</sup>

Whether or not they are fully aware of documentary's 'cruelty', informants themselves may be the eager coproducers of their privacy as public knowledge, and their coproduction of on-camera privacy frequently draws on elements of performance and theatricality. As demonstrated earlier in the analysis of *The Box*, the dimension of affect and performativity is indispensable to an independent documentary's status as compelling information. To count as compelling, a documentary must present visual evidence, in the form of real-life people, moving images, touching stories and memorable events, to the imaginary 'trial court' composed of film festival jurors, media pundits and news reporters. The prerequisite of the 'compelling', the 'moving' and the 'memorable' thus precludes certain visual evidence as undesirable, while it motivates documentarians to pursue other kinds of evidence as enticing or even indispensable. It is exactly at this point that affect as body-oriented, sensuous, emotional and even aesthetic experience comes into play.<sup>50</sup>

Finally, mediation of imaging and information points to the problem of agency in Chinese independent documentary. Whose agency is it anyway? More often than not, it is the agency of independent documentarians as they define their position in defiance of the mainstream media of political censorship and commercial profit chasing.

51 One such attempt to give voice to informants is Wu Wenguang's oral history project, which publishes the transcripts of stories of characters/informants in his documentary film *Jiang Hu* in printed volumes. See Wu Wenguang (ed.), *Xianchang (Document)*, Volume I (Tianjin: Tianjin shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2000), pp. 242–73; Wu Wenguang (ed.), *Xianchang (Document)*, Volume II (Tianjin: Tianjin shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2001), pp. 276–93.

52 Lin Xudong et al., *Jia Zhangke dianying*, pp. 2–4.

53 Ban Wang uses the term to discuss both fiction and documentary films from underground Chinese directors in 'Documentary as haunting of the real: the logic of capital in *Blind Shaft*', *Asian Cinema*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2005), pp. 4–15.

The informants' agency, in so far as they volunteer their privacy as information, is routinely ignored or denied by the international jury, for the access issue – the jurors' lack of linguistic knowledge and/or specialized, indigenous cultural information – prevents them from knowing the (under)represented in these documentary works. Similarly, it is difficult to talk about the informants' subjectivity because documentarians, in spite of their efforts to make informants the 'subjects' with their own voice,<sup>51</sup> have always appeared as the credited producer and director and, by assumption, as the sole 'proprietor' of information thus captured and transmitted. Furthermore, informants are routinely excluded from viewing the products of their private-turned-public information, and their on-camera performance, however compassionate and compelling, pales in comparison with the ostensibly triumphant position of documentarians in global information flows via the transnational media.

Like it or not, to a troubling degree, Chinese independent documentarians have increasingly become 'agents' trusted and entrusted by transnational media to produce images perceived as truths. Admittedly, this shift in the proprietorship of documentary images has troubled some Chinese documentarians. What is meant by 'independence', when they take orders from, and report directly to, overseas funding agencies, be they international film festivals, private foundations or television stations? A recent Chinese documentary series produced for these three institutions includes works by three well-known Chinese independents: *Linqi da shetou/The Secret of My Success* (Duan Jinchuan, 2002), *Xingfu shenghuo/This Happy Life* (Jiang Yue, 2002) and *He ziji tiaowu/Dancing with Myself* (Li Hong, 2002). Likewise, Jia's *In Public* was funded by a South Korean company, incorporated into a three-part omnibus DV project coordinated with Tsai Ming-liang (Cai Mingliang) of Taiwan and John Akomfrah of the UK, and slated for the Chonju International Film Festival in South Korea.<sup>52</sup>

In their capacity as 'agents', as 'representatives' whose agency or subjectivity is invariably compromised by their actual or potential employers, Chinese 'independent' documentarians cannot but act as 'brokers' or 'mediators' in the arbitration of what kind of information is selected, produced, edited and circulated. In conclusion, documentary cannot be conceptualized simply as 'the haunting of the real',<sup>53</sup> for it is primarily the haunting of mediated images, of mediating agents and of mediation itself. The persistence of mediation thus foregrounds contemporary Chinese independent documentary as a case of troubling information in need of our careful scrutiny and continued tracking.

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# Missed encounters: reading, *catalanitat*, the Barcelona School

ROSALIND GALT

Como no podemos hacer Victor Hugo, hacemos Mallarmé  
*Joaquín Jordá*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'Since we can't be Victor Hugo, let's be Mallarmé.' Joaquín Jordá, quoted in Virginia Higginbotham, *Spanish Film Under Franco* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1988), p. 65.

The Barcelona School of the 1960s constitutes a significant European avant-garde film movement, but it has been largely ignored by film history. In beginning with this statement about overlooking, however, I do not wish to make the familiar argument that such-and-such a body of texts must be rediscovered and integrated into the canon. Although it is surely true that the films of the Barcelona School would reward further scholarly attention, I want to suggest that this framework of overlooking is itself significant, and that in considering how and why these films have been largely forgotten, we might be able to interrogate both the films' textual practice and the dominant rhetoric of national, and particularly Catalan, film histories.

In unravelling this rhetoric, I will focus mainly on *Fata Morgana* (1965), the second feature by Catalan director Vicente Aranda and one of the defining texts of the nascent Barcelona School. Although Aranda has more recently become an international arthouse auteur, and the film is possibly the best known of the Barcelona School's brief history, it still remains obscure and seems to sit uncomfortably into histories of Catalan or of Spanish cinemas. Its marginal status makes the film a particularly telling example of what makes the Barcelona School difficult to categorize. As we shall see, the film is at once central to and atypical of the movement, and in this difficult location, the discursive structure of the school might momentarily coalesce. Rather than simply rediscovering a lost classic of 1960s cinema, I want to suggest that in

*Fata Morgana*'s critical reception we can trace the shapes – and the limitations – of existing concepts of Catalan cinematic identities.

I shall argue that *Fata Morgana* stages a more complex encounter with its difficult national space than has been hitherto understood. The film presents Catalan space in terms of a missed encounter: the disjunctive relationship of space and time that for Lacan defines the experience of the real. The missed encounter becomes a mise-en-abyme for the Barcelona School, for while it forms a central textual figure in *Fata Morgana*, it is also the movement's slippery articulations of (national) time and space that result in it being repeatedly 'missed' by film history. This reading, then, works both upon the textual and the extratextual. Not simply an overlooked art movement to be integrated into the critical canon, I read the Barcelona School in terms of this iterative missed encounter with a troublesome experience of *catalanitat*.<sup>2</sup>

At first glance, the Barcelona School appears to be an avant-gardist movement with clear aesthetic and political aims. In 1967, filmmaker Joaquín Jordá published a manifesto for the school, which proclaimed a formal concern for the structure of image and narrative, an experimental character, a co-operative system of production and, most tellingly, characters and situations different from those in the cinema of Madrid.<sup>3</sup> The terms of the manifesto are loose, and make no specific formal demands of affiliated filmmakers. Instead, Jordá emphasizes difference from Madrid: the Barcelona School was to be above all things oppositional to the New Spanish Cinema (NCE), a refusal which incorporated elements of the aesthetic (not derived from neorealism), the institutional (not part of the anti-Franco but possibilist film establishment) and the geopolitical (not Castilian, not Spanish). Some films hewed closely to these rules, for instance the dadaist *Dante no es unicament severo*/*Dante is Not Simply Harsh* (Jacinto Esteva and Joaquín Jordá, 1967) and *No contéis con los dedos*/*Don't Count on your Fingers* (Pere Portabella, 1967). In these films, an anti-Franco imperative was tied for the first time to avant-gardist form rather than to the compromised social progressivism of the New Spanish Cinema auteurs.<sup>4</sup>

However, both critics and members of the Barcelona School agree that the manifesto's performative inception of a singular approach was short-lived, if not always already fictive. While the 'Barcelona School' appellation has become quite standard, it refuses to cohere around any definitive textual, political or aesthetic borders. Peter Besas, in one of the canonical texts on Spanish film history, writes,

The burst of Barcelona film activity in the 1960s came to be called the 'Barcelona School', a label invented by producer Ricardo Muñoz Suay. But in fact, throughout its brief existence and after, members of the Barcelona School persistently denied that the term described any coherent, integrated movement. All seem to object to what they consider to be a misleading label, since the work of each evinces little or no influence from the other directors involved.<sup>5</sup>

2 *Catalanitat* translates as Catalanicity or Catalan identity. Naturally, the critical overlooking might be remedied, but the films themselves continue to stage a textual missed encounter that, I argue, demands a particular kind of reading.

3 Joaquín Jordá, 'La Escuela de Barcelona a través de Carlos Durán', *Nuestro Cine*, no. 61 (1967), p. 36. The manifesto is translated into English in Vicente Molina-Foix, *New Cinema in Spain* (London: British Film Institute, 1977), p. 23.

4 For a discussion of the School's avant-gardist refusal of social realism, see Higginbotham, *Spanish Film Under Franco*, p. 65.

5 Peter Besas, *Behind the Spanish Lens: Spanish Cinema under Fascism and Democracy* (Denver, CO: Arden Press 1985), p. 85.

6 The Barcelona School films refer most closely to the Italian *giallo* and to the British Hammer films. However, horror also has a significant domestic history in the Catalan industry, including the Sitges Fantasy Film Festival and the major Catalan production company Filmax. Also, as Marcel Oms points out, during the dictatorship, low cultural genres like horror provided a way for Spanish films to enter into the European market. See Marcel Oms, 'Pour une approche du nouveau cinéma espagnol', *Cinema 77*, no. 223 (1977), p. 10.

7 Oms argues that Spanish culture under Franco commonly used the joke or the allusion to speak about politics, and that audiences were used to interpreting cowboys, vampires and other such genre figures as subversive allegories of Fascism. Oms, 'Pour une approche', p. 10.

8 Jordá, 'La Escuela de Barcelona', p. 36. See also Esteve Rimbau and Casimiro Torreiro, *La Escuela de Barcelona: el cine de la 'gauche divine'* (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 1999), p. 178.

9 Molina-Foix, *New Cinema in Spain*, pp. 22, 29.

10 Besas, *Behind the Spanish Len*, p. 87 and Jordá, 'La Escuela de Barcelona', p. 36.

11 Jordá, 'La Escuela de Barcelona', p. 36 (my translation).

Little or no influence might be overstating the case, but it is certainly true that the films often interpret opposition to Madrid cinema in radically different ways. While Jordá worked with forms derived from the European historic avant gardes, Aranda in *Fata Morgana* and Carlos Durán in *Cada vez que estoy enamorada creo que es para siempre/Each Time That ...* (1967) drew from the French New Wave and Italian modernism, as well as from New American Cinema. The films are narrative, albeit attenuated, and mix counter-cinematic tropes with a modern pop aesthetic. Meanwhile, Portabella (and to some extent Aranda) moved easily among narrative experimentation, political documentary and the subcultural style of the Euro-horror flick.<sup>6</sup> Whereas *Advocats laboralistes/Labour Lawyers* (1973) was an engaged documentary on lawyers who represented workers in the Francoist justice system, the vampire film *Cuadecuc, vampir/Cuadecuc, Vampire* (1970) blends elements of the Italian *giallo* (an enduring cross-generic form that often includes horror, exploitation, mystery and eroticism), high modernist art film, and an aura of political allegory common in Spanish genre pictures.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, there is little agreement on which directors should be counted in the school. Jordá considers Aranda to be a foundational figure, and yet Aranda himself has claimed that he does not mind whether or not he is included in the movement.<sup>8</sup> Similar uncertainty surrounds key figures Jorge Grau and Portabella. This uncertainty has not been helped by the subsequent careers of the filmmakers in question: after the Barcelona School broke up around 1970, its members moved in radically disparate directions. Jordá quit cinema altogether for a time, Portabella moved into engaged documentary and installation work, while Aranda has become a significant figure in commercial art cinema. Not only did their later works move away from the concerns of the School, but their dispersal across such varied fields of filmmaking makes it harder to see what they had in common in the first place.

In such an incoherent movement, any film might appear both typical and exceptional, and *Fata Morgana* is therefore exemplary in its marginality. The film, which Vicente Molina-Foix describes as 'a bizarre and sometimes fascinating science-fiction parable', departs boldly from New Spanish Cinema, and the 'the unavoidable neo-realist tribute' of Aranda's first film, *Brillante porvenir/Brilliant Future* (1964).<sup>9</sup> With its experimental narrative, private financing and exclusion from the Spanish mainstream, Besas cites *Fata Morgana* as the starting point of the Barcelona School, and Jordá lists it as one of the ten films that defined the movement.<sup>10</sup> And yet, Jordá almost immediately undermines his own claim, arguing that, 'Insofar as *Fata Morgana*, like *Noche de vino tinto* [José María Nunes, 1966] are precedents that we have invented today, it is a lie that they are part of the Barcelona school'.<sup>11</sup> In a move entirely typical of Barcelona School discourse, the movement's most famous film proves to have a liminal relationship with the body of the school.

12 Molina-Foix, *New Cinema in Spain*, p. 22.

13 See Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (eds), *Cinema and Nation* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000) for an outline of these debates.

Thus, the misleading quality that Besas finds in the label can be read as a discursive necessity rather than as a mistake on Muñoz Suay's part. And indeed, we find the same rhetoric across all the historical accounts; Molina-Foix, for instance, describes the school as 'a shapeless group rather than an organised movement'.<sup>12</sup> Over and over, we find this rhetoric of shapelessness, of negative definition, of non-existence – in other words, of a movement that is not one. I take this refusal of coherence as axiomatic of the Barcelona School's intervention in film history. Lacking continuity over time, consistent deployment of experimental forms, and any direct engagement with Spanish or Catalan national politics, these films – and *Fata Morgana* most of all – are structured by a refusal to cohere around signification. For film history, they become illegible.

The lens through which the Barcelona School has most commonly been viewed is national cinema, whether as part of Spanish film history or in terms of a re-emergent Catalan national culture. Critical interest in each of these areas has grown dramatically since the 1960s, and national cinema as a critical category has developed into a standard field in European film studies. Seeking to decentre conventional histories of the 'major' European cinemas, scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s attended to popular films and to smaller nations, shifting the debate from counter-Hollywood art cinemas to national vernaculars. Along with this shift in object came a new consideration of what national cinema might mean: was it to be defined by audiences, production histories or by textual articulations of national identity?<sup>13</sup> These developments were welcome, and yet they ensured that the Barcelona School was again overlooked: ignored in older discussions of the canonical national art cinemas (Franco's Spain being viewed as a backward and insignificant cinematic nation), its films also are far removed from the kind of popular narrative rediscovered in this research. Thus, although both Spanish and, to a lesser degree, Catalan cinemas have been the subject of scholarly attention, in each of these areas, the Barcelona School is 'missed' by film history.

Although I will be arguing for the *catalanitat* of the Barcelona School, it is nevertheless necessary to consider its place in the dominant historiographic category of Spanish cinema. Not only do most existing histories locate Catalan cinema within the Spanish context, but the rhetoric of Spanish film history determines both the production and reception of the School. Spanish cinema in the 1960s has traditionally been a story of the New Spanish Cinema, neorealist influence and responses to dictatorship. Within this matrix, Catalan film in general and the Barcelona School in particular are of marginal interest. As Marcel Oms describes the problem, Spanish filmmakers and critics in the 1960s were acutely aware of their isolation from the rest of Europe, and viewed the creation of a coherent national cinema as an urgent necessity. Neorealism, already part of the critical canon by the time the films came to Spain, was seen by directors such as Luis García Berlanga and Juan Antonio Bardem as the model to follow because it came from the fight



14 Oms, 'Pour une approche', p. 9.

15 See, for instance: Marsha Kinder, *Blood Cinema: the Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993); Christopher Perriam, *Stars and Masculinities in Spanish Cinema: From Banderas to Bardem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Núria Triana-Toribio, *Spanish National Cinema* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003). On the earlier Franco period, see Steven Marsh, *Popular Spanish Film under Franco: Comedy and the Weakening of the State* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2005).

16 Triana-Toribio, *Spanish National Cinema*, p. 74.

17 Examples might be: Tytti Soila, Astrid Söderbergh Widding and Gunnar Iversen (eds), *Nordic National Cinemas* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1998); John Hill, *Border Crossing: Film in Ireland, Britain and Europe* (Belfast: University of Ulster Press, 1994); Sven Joekel, *Contemporary Austrian and Irish Cinema: a Comparative Approach to National Cinema and Film Industry in Small European Countries* (Stuttgart: Edition 451, 2003).

18 José Nunes, quoted in Riambau and Torreiro, *La Escuela de Barcelona*, p. 155 (my translation).

19 Ibid.

against fascism.<sup>14</sup> Thus, although the Barcelona School was arguably more 'advanced', more in touch with international visual cultures, it was inevitably excluded from the dominant nationalizing discourse of anti-Francoist realisms.

Recent revisions of Spanish cinema history have focused on popular genres and away from the official canon of New Spanish Cinema. Thus, while there has been an upsurge in writing about Spanish cinema in the past several years, this new concern for the popular (and to some extent the contemporary, post-Franco era) retains the traditional exclusion of the Barcelona School.<sup>15</sup> Marsha Kinder's substantial study of Spanish film as a national cinema, for example, barely mentions the Barcelona School. Núria Triana-Toribio analyzes representations of the Spanish nation in popular cinema and thus also mentions the School only briefly, and in the negative terms of not being popular and not representing the nation.<sup>16</sup> Her stated aim is to undercut the historical hegemony of the NCE – an aim shared by the Barcelona School – and yet her focus on the popular and the national inadvertently works to marginalize the School from another direction. My point is not to critique these scholars for the scope of their projects, but rather to point to the ways in which the study of Spanish film history, whatever the critical rubric, repeatedly produces this exclusion.

More promising for Catalan films has been the rise in scholarship on marginal national cinemas, small nations and the transnational.<sup>17</sup> Catalonia is useful to this kind of work not just as a peripheral European cinema, but as a stateless nation: a potentially productive limit case or exception to many models of national cultural identity or film production. Since national identity itself has been at stake in Catalan culture – often in a politically charged manner – and since the usual infrastructure of state filmmaking cannot easily be mapped onto situations in which the nation in question is considered a region within a larger state, the textual elaboration of nation in Catalan cinema might open onto the economic, political and cultural parameters of post-national European identities. However, although such approaches are potentially more attuned to the Barcelona School's cultural specificity, texts and history have conspired, once again, to miss each other.

The filmmakers themselves posited sub- or supranational identities as a way to distance themselves from Catalan nationalism. Nunes claimed that

I don't make New Catalan Cinema. I, who am a staunch *barcelonés*, don't have this penchant for nationalism, I don't know what nationalisms are; in any case, I would defend the nationalism of the neighborhood, of the home, of the bar and of us here and now: that is nationalism . . . I make Barcelona cinema, not Catalan cinema.<sup>18</sup>

Likewise, Durán compared the Barcelona School with the New York School, arguing, 'We could make the Barcelona School, just like in New York there is the New York School'.<sup>19</sup> While Nunes's claim performs the apolitical affect critics resented in the School, Durán makes



20 Roman Gubern, quoted in Jean-Paul Aubert, 'Vers le néant? L'Ecole de Barcelone et l'esthétique du vide', *Cahiers de Narratologie*, no. 12 (2005), p. 9.

21 Guy Gauthier, 'L'identité du cinéma catalan', *Image et Son*, no. 377 (1982), p. 115. See also Marco Gazzano, 'Nel cinema delle minoranze una informazione alternativa', *Cinema Nuovo*, no. 255 (1978), pp. 34–7.

22 Colin McArthur, *Scotch Reels: Scotland in Cinema and Television* (London: British Film Institute, 1980); Duncan Petrie, *Screening Scotland* (London: British Film Institute, 2000).

23 Marvin D'Lugo, 'Catalan cinema: historical experience and cinematic practice', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, vol. 13, nos 1–3 (1991), pp. 131–46.

24 Paul Julian Smith, *The Moderns: Time, Space, and Subjectivity in Contemporary Spanish Culture* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 19.

25 Thomas Elsaesser, *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005).

clear the aesthetic and avant-gardist polemic involved in locating identity in a city rather than a nation. Modern art movements, unlike cinematic new waves, tend to be connected to global cities: as New York, Paris, Berlin, so Barcelona. And Roman Gubern cited the importance of European intellectual life in defining the School's identity, describing the influence of Roland Barthes, semiotics and the Gruppo 63.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the School's avant gardism demanded both a local and an international identity, a doubled structure that did not so much oppose national discourse as radically refuse its liberal progressive manifestations.

It is these liberal discourses of national identity that have largely dominated Catalan film histories, and recent work on the transnational has not yet been brought to bear on Franco-era film. In the immediate post-Franco moment, international critics called for Catalan films to join the European mainstream, constructing the relation of national to European in heritage film terms. Guy Gauthier, for example, advised Catalan filmmakers to mix Hollywood narration with distinctive national qualities, such as folkloric traditions, local genres and historical stories.<sup>21</sup> Such folkloric practices of national cinema are not unusual (see, for instance, Colin MacArthur's and Duncan Petrie's critiques of Scottish cinema's clichéd discourses of tartanry),<sup>22</sup> but as in Scotland, Catalan cinema has moved on from such limiting manifestations of nation to develop a new model of Europeanist Catalan culture. This post-Franco identity is debated by Marvin D'Lugo and Paul Julian Smith. D'Lugo analyzes Jaime Camino's *Dragón Rapide* (1986), claiming its polemic deployment of Pablo Casals's speech in Catalan and his playing of the Ode to Joy not as evidence of a national identity but as the construction of a European identity, in which Catalonia represents the 'creative frontier' of Spain.<sup>23</sup> Smith takes issue with this notion, arguing for a contemporary Catalan culture that must be understood as discursively independent of Spain. He cites films such as *La Teta i la lluna/The Tit and the Moon* (Bigas Luna, 1994), which was shot in Catalan, funded by the Catalan government, and overtly thematizes national identity.<sup>24</sup> In the broader frame, Thomas Elsaesser's recent work outlines the economic networks as well as the double ethnic and cultural occupancies that characterize today's sub-, trans- and supranational European cinemas.<sup>25</sup>

Such debates on contemporary cinema locate new models of culture in a post-national European context, but while these approaches might speak easily to the recent efflorescence of *catalanitat*, they place the films of the Franco era in a bind. Although new films can be easily constructed as developing a more complex image of Catalonia, censorship meant that Franco-era texts were unable to contain any such signifiers of cultural identity, doubled or not. (To some degree, marginal films could push the boundaries of state censorship but the situation was far from easy. Most obviously, films could not be made in the Catalan language. And given the police raid on the 1967 Sitges film conference at which Jordá presented his manifesto for the Barcelona School, it is clear that coercion was never far from the minds of any Catalan film

<sup>26</sup> For more examples of the relationship between the Barcelona School and censorship, see my 'Mapping Catalonia in 1967: the Barcelona School in global context', *Senses of Cinema*, no. 41 (2006). URL: <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/06/41/barcelona-school.html> [accessed 26 March 2007].

<sup>27</sup> This emerging area will undoubtedly produce scholarship on the Barcelona School and on Catalan film more broadly, but has not done so yet.

community.<sup>26</sup>) As a result, not only was the Barcelona School a poor example for an earlier European heritage film model, but also it has provided little traction for readings of the marginal nation or even for industrial or cultural accounts of the transnational. Despite the avant-garde internationalism of Nunes and Durán, the Barcelona School's encoding of identity remained unreadable.

In fact, it would seem that none of these models is able to frame the Barcelona avant garde as part of a national (or even transnational) cinema. It does not fit within post-Franco models of international art cinema, nor within 'representations-of' studies of national identity, much less in a contemporary Catalan cultural studies mode. Nor can we search for codes of submerged Catalanism, as D'Lugo does. Catalanism itself is an inadequate model here, for it begins with a singular and stable sense of national identity, precisely the quality refused by the Barcelona School films. Catalan cinema may be a unique example, because of the tremendous politicization of questions of nationality, language and identity. Between the contentious debate on Catalanism as a political movement and the refusal of the Barcelona School to represent itself as national, the films emerge as structurally inconsistent with any rhetoric of nation or identity. They cannot but be excluded from discourses on national cinema, and their refusal of any overt codes of belonging makes it almost as hard to place them within models of the transnational.

Thus, the School's radical incoherence is not simply a case of being critically unfashionable. Its texts are unassimilable by conventional national histories, and no less by culturalist accounts of marginal national representation, or indeed by recent claims on a transnational European cinema.<sup>27</sup> The School's obdurate refusal to fit into critical categories begins to appear less of a problem with historiography and more of a textual strategy. Instead of simply locating (and celebrating) national signifiers, it is necessary to locate the Barcelona School more precisely as a textual structure and to clarify the political stakes in reading these films.

The difficulty of reading the Barcelona School as national cinema produces a political problem of interpretation, in which only two arguments, each limiting, seem to be possible. The negative position views the movement as insufficiently engaged with national-political questions, and hence apolitical, insufficiently Catalanist and aesthetically elitist. The recuperative position attempts to find an implicit nationalism in the films, claiming that merely by dint of being different from Madrid cinema, the School invokes radical Catalan difference. Either way, the only possible reading practice is one based upon an assumed work of national cinema that links politics to a narrow range of aesthetic practices and is consequently inattentive to the films' textuality.

The negative assessment of the School has historically been the dominant one, stemming from contemporary local criticisms of its avant-gardist refusal to engage with either Catalan nationalism or cinematic realism. As Esteve Riambau and Casimiro Torreiro put it,

28 Riambau and Torreiro, *La Escuela de Barcelona*, p. 184 (my translation).

29 Miquel Porter Moix, 'Entre el "ensayo" y el "commercial"', *Destino*, vol. 30, no.1 (1967), p. 581.

30 Jesús Angulo, Quim Casas and Sara Torres, 'Entrevista: Garay, Guerin, Jordà y Portabella', *Nosferatu: Revista de Cine*, no. 9 (1992), pp. 68–87.

31 See, for example, Oms, 'Pour une approche', Molina-Foix, *New Cinema in Spain*, and, in a more sympathetic assessment, John Hopewell, *Out of the Past: Spanish Cinema After Franco* (London: British Film Institute, 1986), pp. 69–70.

32 Kinder, *Blood Cinema*, p. 394.

33 Besas, *Behind the Spanish Lens*, p. 87.

34 Higginbotham, *Spanish Film Under Franco*, p. 65.

Never had a cinematographic movement surfaced in Spain, much less in Catalonia, that sparked such belligerent condemnation as the Barcelona School. From its double provocation, anti-realist and anti-Catalanist, this movement, rooted in the avant garde, was the object of a ferociously aggressive criticism that derived from the simultaneous frustration provoked by the premature death of the NCE and the aborted birth of the New Catalan Cinema.<sup>28</sup>

Miquel Porter Moix exemplified this Catalan nationalist criticism when, in 1967, he used the premiere of *Dante* to claim publically that the filmmakers of the School did not live up to the grave responsibilities of the Catalan artist.<sup>29</sup> Jordà claimed that the critics of *Destino* hated the School for being insufficiently Catalan and therefore refused to see it as a legitimate movement.<sup>30</sup> And the few European film historians who addressed the movement in the 1970s and 1980s also found the lack of *catalanitat* troubling, citing the use of Spanish, artistic pretension, and the refusal of socially engaged realism as barriers to national representation.<sup>31</sup>

By the late 1980s, English-language (and particularly US) critics were developing a more positive position, citing a range of ways in which the Barcelona School could be read as politically – and by extension, nationally – radical after all. Kinder argues that 'During the Francoist era, any difference in verbal or filmic language in the Catalan cinema carried subversive implications, even when the plot seemed more personal than political'.<sup>32</sup> By rejecting the cinema of Bardem and Berlanga, she finds that the Barcelona School managed to marginalize Castilian culture and evade its influence. This theme is echoed by Besas, for whom 'Even those Barcelona films that were not overtly political had a tacit political tinge to them, for the very fact that they were not being made within the framework of the official film establishment, that they were questing and experimental'.<sup>33</sup> Here, any film outside of either the realist house style of the NCE or any produced outside the infrastructure of the Francoist film industry would have an automatic claim on a radicality that, for Kinder at least, is locatable as Catalan difference.

Virginia Higginbotham makes clear the relationship between political and aesthetic radicalism in this position, one that mirrors the demands for realism in the School's detractors:

With the first opportunity offered by *apertura*, the Barcelona School, like a rare plant growing through hairline cracks in the fascist façade, began to appear. Unconcerned with attracting a public and ignoring the *franquista* myths, Barcelona directors tried to differentiate themselves from their more sober, socially aware colleagues in Madrid. . . . They distinguished themselves by forging the only avant-garde cinema in the country as well as engaging in the only film activity truly independent of Madrid.<sup>34</sup>

In reading the films as radical because of their formal experimentation, critics such as Higginbotham, Kinder and D'Lugo remind us of the political nature of making non-standard films within a dictatorship and rehabilitate the Barcelona School directors as Catalan artists. However, as far as this claim enables a recuperative reading of avant gardism as anti-Francoist, it fails to detail either how exactly we read this formal radicalism or where *catalanitat* is to be located beyond a simple claim of difference-from-Madrid.

These reading positions form a binary structure, compulsively repeating the terms in which Jordá described the School's aesthetic options: since we can't be Hugo, let's be Mallarmé. A monolithic opposition is erected whereby texts function in either a social or an aesthetic realm, but not both. Thus, although the positions seem to be in opposition (the School fails to be radical/political vs the School succeeds in being radical/political), they actually work to create a double bind in which, either way, the relationship of politics with aesthetics is transparent, already spoken for and, hence, properly unreadable. The negative argument demands that we read politics directly from content, rendering form irrelevant. It demands that an anti-Franco film narrate repression directly and that a Catalan film stage nationalism overtly. Although few critics would read ideology as so transparent in, say, Godard or Antonioni, the fact of Catalan oppression changes the rules, and obviates the need to consider formal complexity.

The other side of the binary is trickier, for it includes more complex criticism and appears to consider the films' experimental form. D'Lugo and Kinder, for example, argue that the School's avant-gardist form *defines* its political radicality. Certainly, under dictatorship, any claim of difference is simultaneously an act of resistance. But while this position gestures towards formal interpretation, what it elides is interpretation itself, shortcutting it by claiming that avant-garde form automatically equates to political and cultural radicality. Even were we to accept this claim, it does not take us very far without close attention to the specifics: what form? radical how? This stopping of interpretation is also at work in the claim on Catalan specificity: it is not enough to state difference from Madrid cinema without going on to interrogate the specific structure and significance of that difference. And, of course, it may well prove problematic to locate *catalanitat* simply in terms of difference from Madrid, so that Spanish culture still exerts a defining influence, albeit negatively. For small nations subsumed in larger states, this problem is perhaps an inevitability, but it makes for weak cultural theory. I want to suggest, therefore, that the imbrication of aesthetics and politics in the Barcelona School both requires and deflects a work of formal reading. To transcend the Hugo–Mallarmé binary, it is necessary to render the textual production of *catalanitat* legible.

But how do we read nation in a text that slips through the grasp of every taxonomic paradigm? The answer is to interrogate exactly the structure

35 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, Jacques-Alain Miller (ed.) (New York, NY: Norton, 1998), p. 39.

36 In addition to the professor's claim that the victims want to die, the images of the victims produce a relation of complicity – young, pretty women, they are shown in a series of closeup head shots, looking at or for the camera in poses reminiscent of advertisements.

of omissions and incoherencies that has led to the Barcelona School's disappearance from film history. For this repeatedly missed encounter is not only a function of historiographical lapses, but also names precisely the textual strategy by which *Fata Morgana* stages the difficulty of Catalan space and time. The missed encounter is, of course, Jacques Lacan's *tuché*, the encounter with the real, and as Lacan glosses Freud, he makes clear the signifiatory nature of this structure: 'We shall see how by means of repetition, as repetition of deception, Freud coordinates experience, *qua* deceiving, with a real that will henceforth be situated in the field of science, situated as that which the subject is condemned to miss, but even this miss is revelatory'.<sup>35</sup> I would suggest that *Fata Morgana*'s missed encounters are indeed revelatory, and that by analyzing their textual production we can deconstruct the realism/aestheticism impasse and, after all, read a Catalan politics in the film's formal engagement with the real.

*Fata Morgana* places literal encounters as central to both of its parallel narratives. In one, a mysterious serial killer may be stalking a beautiful model named Gim, whereas in the other, the residents of Barcelona flee an unnamed cataclysmic event. The stakes of both storylines are established in an early scene of a criminology professor and his wife: she leaves town in order to evade the terrifying event, while he insists on staying to give a lecture on the serial killer. In his lecture, the professor describes murder as a desired meeting, the encounter of victim and killer.<sup>36</sup> However, while the text sets up these fateful encounters as desired events for the spectator, it goes on to demonstrate a repeated, compulsive failure to connect. Gim, who has been identified as the killer's next victim, is the focus of a series of incomplete or failed encounters. The killer never finds her, and neither does J.J., the agent sent to track her down, ever manage to reach her. Moreover, as Gim wanders the city, she is constantly hailed unsuccessfully by men. In one scene, a man stops his car, gets out and calls 'Señorita ... ?' as she turns the corner to avoid him. In another, she ignores a man who accosts her from behind a barred basement window, demanding to know the time.

The cataclysmic event, meanwhile, structures a narrative in which it is the spectator who undergoes a missed encounter. The film begins with an intertitle that reads, 'Note to the viewer: this film takes place after the events in London'. From the outset, the viewer has 'missed' a crucial narrative event and, by articulating the London event as if it were real, the text demands from the spectator knowledge that she cannot possibly possess. This refusal to show narrative events onscreen may seem at first to be a function of suspense (just what *did* happen in London?), but *Fata Morgana* consistently shields the spectator from her desired meeting with dramatic action. Miriam's murder of Alvaro takes place offscreen, and in one instance, the spectator misses action that takes place in the narrative present while she is watching a flashback. This structure culminates in the film's ending, in which the unnamed catastrophe occurs in Barcelona *after* the end of the film. Just as it began with an intertitle,

37 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, p. 55.

38 See, for instance: Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Thomas Elsaesser, 'Trauma: postmodernism as mourning work', *Screen*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2001), pp. 193–201; E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: the Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

39 Brad Epps, 'Modern spaces: building Barcelona', in Joan Ramon Resina (ed.), *Iberian Cities* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001), p. 149.

the film ends with a title superimposed on an aerial shot of the city, 'and then, the same thing happened as in London'. Thus, the film's main event, its encounter with a catastrophic real, is missed by the diegesis.

The point here is not simply that *Fata Morgana* thematizes missed encounters in its elliptical narrative. More importantly, the unseen catastrophes that bookend the narration destabilize the categories of both event and experience. The missed encounter with the real finds its origin, as Lacan points out, in Freud's investigation of trauma: 'The function of the *tuché*, of the real as encounter – the encounter in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter – first presented itself in the history of psycho-analysis in a form that was in itself already enough to arouse our attention, that of the trauma'.<sup>37</sup> And while it is important that the real is not, for Lacan, co-extensive with trauma (although it is often treated as such), it is in the literature of trauma that the missed encounter has been most frequently explored. The belated manifestation of the traumatic event, Freud's structure of *nachträglichkeit*, has become a central theoretical paradigm for understanding the cultural expression of historical trauma.<sup>38</sup> To consider the traumatic dimension of the missed encounter is to articulate the psychoanalytic account of emotional experience with the primarily structural version that I argue characterizes Catalan historiography.

This association of the missed encounter with trauma is suggestive, for not only does *Fata Morgana* evoke violent events, but the film is made at a time of political oppression readily imaginable as traumatic. We can place 1960s Catalonia in relation to several historical trajectories: the modern submersion of the region within Castilian Spain, the mid-twentieth-century oppression of Francoism and the acutely traumatic generational memory of the Spanish Civil War. The intersection of these events entails a cultural experience of violence and loss that may well provoke difficulties of representation. Catalonia is often viewed as central to the history of the Spanish dictatorship, not least because of the scale of suffering there during the Civil War. And contemporary work on Catalan nationalism attends to the fundamental dislocation sometimes perceived in the condition of the stateless nation.<sup>39</sup> Further, all art during the Franco era was made under a condition of crisis. Individual filmmakers may or may not have personally feared for their lives, but it remains undeniable that the history, within a generation, of disappearance, torture and murder of democrats and leftists casts a shadow of violence over any form of political speech.

We might, therefore, think of *Fata Morgana* as a traumatic text: one in which the historical experiences of Francoism cannot be spoken directly, and indeed are properly barred entirely from cognition. The film cannot speak about what happened in London, nor can it show what is to happen in Barcelona. It can only offer glimpses of a violence that it can never fully aver. The closest the film comes to a representation of its originary trauma is the flashback that depicts Miriam's memory of Jerry's death during the London event. The scene begins with an underground chase



40 Adam Lowenstein, *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 2.

41 André Bazin, *What Is Cinema, Volume II*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 16–41.

42 Aranda claims that the lack of coherence in *Fata Morgana* was, 'a move to distract the censors' attention from the covert political implications of the film by use of the stock genres of detective and science fiction films'. Vicente Aranda, quoted in D'Lugo, 'Catalan cinema', p. 139. I do not doubt this strategy on the part of filmmakers during dictatorship, but I would argue that *Fata Morgana*'s textuality exceeds the boundaries of this project.

and culminates with the discovery of Jerry's body, his featureless face a grotesque blank mask. This image may be read as what Adam Lowenstein, in his study of historical trauma in the horror film, calls an 'allegorical moment . . . a shocking collision of film, spectator and history where registers of historical space and bodily time are disrupted, confronted, and intertwined'.<sup>40</sup> This horrific corporeal sight can allegorize the inception of Francoist authority, but it does so in a way that is, even by modernist film standards, particularly attenuated. Jerry's body is the only image in the film that is fully irrational – an obscene irruption of horror or science fiction into the body of the text. And what makes the spectacle of Jerry's death particularly shocking is that his face is blanked out. In place of the expected marks of violence, there are no signifiers at all. The greatest violence, according to this scene, is the one that precludes witnessing. Thus, the traumatic memory can only be visualized at several removes, through a special effect, contained in a subjective flashback, about an unseen event in a foreign city.

Trauma censors political speech as effectively as the repressive state apparatus (which is to say brutally but incompletely), and in the traumatic text, political realities cannot always be expressed via the formal codes of realism. In the case of the Barcelona School, the version of neorealism espoused by Spain's progressive auteurs was particularly problematic. As André Bazin and many subsequent critics have emphasized, the Italian postwar films that so influenced Berlanga and Bardem tied anti-Fascist politics to cinematic ontology.<sup>41</sup> Realism here depends upon a claim that political truth can be both visible and guaranteed by filmic form. It is this precise ability of representation to speak directly that trauma denies, leaving realism unable to stage adequately the experience of Catalan mid-century history. It will be clear that this refusal of realism exceeds the recuperative 'evasion of censorship' rhetoric, in which avant-gardist form is explained as a director's attempt to bypass interference from government.<sup>42</sup> Traumatic illegibility is neither a rejection of politics, nor an affirmation of Catalan cultural difference, nor even a radical, counter-cinematic critique of realism's ideological claims. Rather, it is a textualization of an experience that can only be encountered as missed, and therefore only appears indirectly, in distorted fashion, in the margins of discourse.

The structure of trauma opens up a space for reading *Fata Morgana*'s staging of a difficult real, but there are, nonetheless, important differences between the historical location of the Barcelona School and those of the canonical literatures of trauma. First, the effect of *nachträglichkeit* is often associated with texts produced substantially after the traumatic event itself. In the case of the Barcelona School, the historical trauma of Francoism was a continuing experience, an event not only of memory but also of quotidian presence. Moreover, the Catalan experience provides an origin different in nature than the usual defining event. The horrors of the Civil War and Francoist repression may be compared with other instances of historical violence, but to formulate the



<sup>43</sup> There is precedent for this move: Paul Julian Smith argues that the experience of location comes to define Catalan identity, more than language, shared culture or history, for both Catalan theorists and in popular political discourse. Smith, *The Moderns*, p. 92.

<sup>44</sup> D'Lugo, 'Catalan cinema', pp. 132–3.

question as one of *catalanitat* is immediately to provoke dissent. To state that Catalan oppression, as a distinct subject of history (beyond Francoism in Spain), is traumatic is already to make a political statement. And finally, although this claim on national experience is closely linked to the years of the Civil War, there is again a lack of historical distance. In the 1960s, Catalonia's statelessness and its troubled relation to Spain are conditions rather than singular events.

These differences have implications for the film's textual strategies: historical time is de-emphasized in *Fata Morgana*'s fantastical narrative, and its refusal of realist form entails also a foreclosure of any direct historico-political referent. Since its trauma cannot be understood as a past event, it can be neither named directly nor expressed as after-effect. *Fata Morgana* suggests a different approach: rather than considering traumatic time, we must read its missed encounters in terms of traumatic space. This approach moves away from the historical emphasis of trauma studies, focusing instead on Catalan identity as the locus of the real.<sup>43</sup> *Catalanitat* is what the subject is condemned to miss, and by attending to the film's staging of this encounter, we can discern a national discourse in the film's figurative and disturbing spaces. As with dreamwork, the traumatic space never appears as itself, but always in displaced, distorted or marginal form. In such a structure, no positivist Catalanism is conceivable: *Fata Morgana*'s national discourse is not simply a submerged Catalanism, lurking beneath the codes of censorship, but exceeds and troubles nationalist ideology.

We can contrast *Fata Morgana* here with *Dragón rapide*, a film in which Catalan space, language and culture signify quite directly. As D'Lugo points out, the film's juxtaposition of Casals and Franco is clear and polemic.<sup>44</sup> For *Fata Morgana*, such a unitary enunciative position is exactly what is impossible, either as subject position or as spatial location. And by staging the political indirectly, as a problem of space, *Fata Morgana* is able to include this very problem of representation in its formal articulation. Thus, while there is undoubtedly an allegorical aspect to 'what happened in London,' its significance is not exhausted by mapping it onto a historical event. *Fata Morgana*'s missed encounters consistently locate the troublesome real spatially, from the city spaces of London and Barcelona to the narrow streets and photographic framings in which Gim is repeatedly pinned down. Space is both geographical and cinematic in form, and the intersections of these registers conjure an image of Catalan space in which emptiness and dislocation prove to be the only terms possible in which to imagine the national present. The analyses that follow isolate two of these conjunctions: the framed woman and the evacuated city.

The cinematic space of *Fata Morgana* resolutely insists on framing the woman, pinning Gim and the other victims in tight shots, closeups and internal frames. This technique at first suggests a classical structure of gendered looking, in which the camera, like the serial killer, holds the woman in a sadistic and threatening gaze. The importance of the frame to holding the woman in place is made manifest in the professor's lecture,

in which he shows slides of previous victims. While his voiceover explains that some women have a victim personality which invites violent crime, the image shows a series of still photographs of young women, all looking towards the camera in fashion-shoot poses, producing a relation of complicity with the camera. The professor's next photographs were taken at the scene of the previous murder, and the aesthetically composed shots of a woman being stabbed imply even more directly a proximity between photographer and killer. A closeup of Gim, identified as the next victim, completes the chain of connections from the fetishistic closeup of the woman in the image to the violent meeting with the 'murder-fetishist' in the diegesis.

Thus far, framing might be said to operate similarly to many films in which the sadistic gaze of the camera is narrativized as murderous, *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960) being the obvious contemporaneous example.<sup>45</sup> But the murder photographs are part of a larger structure of framing, in which Gim is repeatedly followed and cornered: she is watched not only by the spectator, but by Alvaro, J.J., the professor, the gang of boys, Miriam and, presumably, the killer. She is constantly framed as the unwilling object of a potentially violent look, whether the subject of that look is known to her or not. We see this structure quite directly in the scenes of Gim being chased by the boys, but it is not limited to narration. For instance, in an early scene, Gim, with several other women, helps a friend to pack up his *objets d'art*. As Gim announces that she is not leaving town, she is caught in a highly stylized composition: framed on both sides by theatrical curtains, she is 'watched' by three out-of-focus figurative statues behind her, while the arm of another statue intrudes into the frame to her left. (The shot is also taken from the point of view of the other characters, looking from offscreen.) Fetish figures proliferate throughout this scene, from the Russian doll that Gim nervously plays with to the bust and the paintings that face her. This subjection, in which Gim is constantly framed (for real and inanimate watchers), does include the male gaze of feminist film theory, but expands its terms to imply the Lacanian gaze of the Other.<sup>46</sup> The threat to Gim is diffuse, unknowable, and its emergence through framing locates violence in the lurking presence of the real.

The confluence of gender, photography and threat evokes surrealism, and Luis Buñuel in particular, whereas the search for Gim recalls what Linda Williams calls the 'typical Surrealist pursuit of an infinitely desirable – because ultimately elusive – love object'.<sup>47</sup> There is, undoubtedly, a Buñuelian strategy at work here, using patriarchal desire against itself to lay bare the intimate operation of bourgeois society. Locating the politically unspeakable in a mise-en-scene of narrative uncertainty and gendered violence suggests a relationship with a socially grounded real similar to that of *Viridiana* (1961) or indeed Buñuel's earlier films. The reference is weighted: the Barcelona School invoked the historic avant garde frequently, from *Fata Morgana*'s titular reference to André Breton to Portabella's documentary on Joan Miró.

45 For a discussion of *Peeping Tom* in relation to Lacan and the gaze, see Parveen Adams, 'Father, can't you see I'm filming?', in Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay (eds), *Vision in Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), pp. 203–26. See also Lowenstein's discussion of the film in terms of trauma in *Shocking Representation*, pp. 55–82.

46 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, pp. 91–100.

47 Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire: a Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1981), p. 174.

48 Molina-Foix, *New Cinema in Spain*, p. 29. See also D'Lugo, 'Catalan cinema', p. 138, and Riambau and Torreiro, *La Escuela de Barcelona*, pp. 85–6.

49 D'Lugo, 'Catalan cinema', p. 138. Certainly, signifiers of modern lifestyle proliferate in the film, from Alvaro's white minimalist art studio to the students who turn on all their appliances at once (jukebox, blender, TV, fan) to create a cacophony of industrial objects. Carlos Durán's film *Cada vez que . . .* also provides an example of this confluence. Also centred on a model, it features a character newly arrived from Italy, thereby explicitly connecting the economic miracles and fashion cultures of Europe that Spanish modernization sought to emulate. Hopewell tartly presents the case against this kind of representation, when he describes *Cada vez que . . .* as having 'the winning morality of a Martini advertisement'. Hopewell, *Out of the Past*, p. 69.

50 Besas, *Behind the Spanish Lens*, p. 70.

51 Raymond Carr, *Modern Spain 1875–1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 162.

52 Ibid.

53 See Albert Balcells, *Catalan Nationalism Past and Present*, trans. Jacqueline Hall and Geoffrey J. Walker (New York, NY: St Martin's Press, 1996), p. 146.

Moreover, since Buñuel's films were banned in Spain at the time, his influence via foreign film festival screenings was, in itself, a political statement. But while surrealism provided a rich model for engaging social realities indirectly, what is revealed in *Fata Morgana* is specific to the Catalonia of the 1960s.

As many commentators note, the Barcelona School was concurrent with the mid-1960s explosion in advertising consumer culture and fashion in Spain.<sup>48</sup> In fact, the School was often condemned for this connection, seen as superficial in its emulation of 'a glossy, fashion magazine style and chic television advertising techniques'.<sup>49</sup> In this context, it is significant that the framed image of Gim recurs in the film as an advertisement. Gim is a model, and we see her in two different ads: winking at the camera in a Cinzano billboard and looking pensive in a perfume ad. In both of these, the frame becomes a trap as her image is stolen and appropriated by others. The first instance comes near the film's opening, when the group of five young men use a ladder and saw to cut out Gim's upper body from the billboard. They carry their prize through the streets, creating an internal frame in a shot from above. The cutout board becomes a tight medium-shot, trapping Gim's already commodified image in a newly appropriated fetish. A similar effect occurs when the professor pulls a poster of Gim's perfume ad out of a swimming pool, carries it across the street and then draws onto the image. The inclusion of Gim's image in consumer culture extends the connection of framing to threat, allowing her to be cut, stolen and defaced by men. And, against the critics who see in the Barcelona School a superficial embrace of consumerism, I would argue that this structure ties spatial trauma to a contemporary discourse of Catalan modernity.

The growth of consumerism in 1960s Spain is in many ways comparable to the 'economic miracles' in Italy and West Germany. However, as Besas explains, Spain had been quite under-developed until the 1950s, and the dictatorship had contributed to a sense of the country as a cultural and economic backwater.<sup>50</sup> Hence, the surge of modernization in the 1960s was more dramatic and transformative than in other European countries. To take a pertinent statistical example, television ownership grew from 1% of the population in 1960 to 90% in 1970.<sup>51</sup> As Raymond Carr puts it: 'In structural terms, Spanish society changed more rapidly between 1957 and 1978 than in the previous century'.<sup>52</sup> And while this social shift affected all of Spain, it had a distinct effect in Catalonia. Much economic growth came from the tourist industry, which was centred on Catalonia's coast. The influx of European tourists, as well as a wave of internal migration, had a profound effect on Catalan identity. Thus, while Carr characterizes the period as relatively depoliticized, with the raised standard of living temporarily quelling protest, modernization did contribute to the emergence of a Catalan cultural renewal. The new mass media included many Catalan organizations, including Catalan-language publishing houses, magazines and popular music.<sup>53</sup> Even advertising could be a function of national identity: Teresa Gimpera was a successful model

from Barcelona when she was cast as Gim in *Fata Morgana* – a famous Catalan in modern Spain.

Thus, the framed image of the woman in *Fata Morgana* – the frame as cage – stages Catalan space in terms of a separation from, or enclosure within, the modernity that it seems to endorse. Gim's advertising image becomes another missed encounter, where her pursuers can only find copies of her, never the original. Even in sequences of Gim herself, modelling or staring into her mirror, she is closely framed, surrounded by beauty products and separated from other spaces in the frame. Internal framing combines with the fetishization of consumer images to prevent any direct engagement with social space. These caged images condense the visual discourses of consumerism, surrealism and gendered looking to stage an encounter with contemporary Catalan space. And this process does not produce a flattened, proto-postmodern surface, but rather understands *catalanitat* in terms of a space mediated by modernization, consumerism, threat and violence. *Catalanitat*, here, is not only defined by the traumatic repression of Franco, but describes an experience of place in which political violence, aesthetic modernity and national expression are tightly imbricated.

*Fata Morgana*'s most insistent spatial figure is the city of Barcelona, as Gim and J.J. encounter their pursuers in narrow streets, parks and industrial sites. The city is an always already politicized space in relation to Catalan cultural identity, as arguments about the Barcelona School's much-vaunted difference from Madrid illustrate. It should come as no surprise, then, that the film's most direct articulation of politics is to be found in its construction of a city under threat. In the professor's lecture, his words about the murders explicitly invoke political violence. He says, 'only a desired fatality can truncate an existence and that fatality is the daughter of fear; fear, the authentic whip, the true epidemic, so contagious that all of the city, all of the country becomes its victim'. Here, Gim stands in for the threatened city, and the city represents the nation, in a neat telescoping of political allegory. Read this way, the entire text can be seen as a kind of national allegory.<sup>54</sup> Gim, victimized by the serial killer, is the oppressed Catalan subject, and Barcelona, subjected to the mysterious event, figures the violence done to Catalonia. However, to focus only the textualization of coded anti-Francoism would reinstate a positivist model of Catalanism that the film's formal organization of space works to disturb.<sup>55</sup> By attending to how the city is represented formally, as well as narratively, we can read Barcelona as a traumatic space as well as a politically contested one.

Evacuation defines *Fata Morgana*'s representation of the city: since most people have already fled in the face of catastrophe when the narrative begins, the film's exterior shots depict urban spaces emptied of people. When Gim is harassed by men, these interactions are uncanny partly because the streets are otherwise deserted. Likewise, in the sequence in which J.J. is chased by a group of men, the action shifts from

54 See Fredric Jameson, 'Third-world literature in the era of multinational capitalism', *Social Text*, no. 15 (1986). This approach is also central to D'Lugo's reading of the film as an 'allegory of suppressed Catalan identity'. D'Lugo, 'Catalan cinema', p. 139.

55 It is also important to note that *Fata Morgana*'s extremely elliptical narrative does not represent the most political clarity possible under Franco. Jaime Camino's *España otra vez/Spain Again* (1969) tells a highly charged story of a US doctor who returns to Spain after having volunteered in the Civil War. While the film is hardly a rousing endorsement of Republicanism, it tells a provocative and overtly political story, allowing audiences to read between lines that are much more obviously staked out than those in *Fata Morgana*. Thus, *Fata Morgana*'s formal difficulty is not simply a question of necessity in response to state censorship.

narrow, city-centre streets through a run-down industrial area to the sea without ever encountering another person. The effect of this evacuation is to shift visual emphasis onto the negative space of cinematic composition: the background of architecture, streets, open spaces. J.J.'s escape is suspenseful as much for the abandoned cranes and blank expanses of wasteground as it is for the figures involved in the chase. And when Gim runs from house to house, looking for help after Alvaro's murder, it is the emptiness of the historic quarter that creates fear. This effect culminates in the final scene, in which an aerial shot frames Gim and the boys against a large flat expanse of grassy ground. As the helicopter gets further and further away, the composition rapidly minimizes the human figures, showing only the empty background that is the city.

Constructing Barcelona via negative space creates an obvious difficulty in reading the city in terms of national identity. There are no conventional architectural signifiers of Barcelona – no shots of Gaudí's *Sagrada Família* or *la Rambla*. Nor can identity be constituted through the popular – there is literally no population in sight. This problematic absence is figured poignantly in the zoo scene, in which Gim and the professor drive a miniature train past several animal enclosures. The playground and café are deserted, but in a series of lateral tracking shots, we see the city's remaining inhabitants (penguins, giraffes, flamingos) in their cages. The sense of loss engendered by the abandoned zoo animals points to the importance of affect in this spatial regime: to figure national identity negatively is not to abandon any investment of desire in the idea. In fact, the evacuated city demands to be read as a figuration of *catalanitat* – and demands moreover that we read that structure as political – and yet it empties it of positive content. Shots of empty streets point self-consciously to what is missing, mourning that which cannot be in the frame. Figured in negative space, *catalanitat* is everywhere, and yet it is itself evacuated, an impossible identity.

Some of these tropes connect with wider postwar cinematic trends in Europe. The cold minimalism of Alvaro's art room (complete with murder weapon sculpture) skewers the cultural modernity that was transforming western Europe in the mid 1960s, and the film's alienated relation to urban space has more than a passing similarity to the critique of Italian modernization that Angelo Restivo finds in the work of Antonioni.<sup>56</sup> But the evacuated city produces a form of space that resonates uniquely in Catalan culture. (It is suggestive in this regard that Catalan writer Miquel de Palol's 1989 award-winning novel *El jardí dels set crepuscles/The Garden of Seven Twilights* featured terrified residents trying to evacuate Barcelona in the face of an apocalyptic warning.<sup>57</sup>) The evacuated city combines the Catalan emphasis on place with an uncanny, unspeakable violence. Like Jerry's blanked-out face, the people who might witness history are simply not there. *Catalanitat* cannot be represented in either event or experience, or rather can only be located in events and experiences in so far as they are missed. Barred from

56 Angelo Restivo, *The Cinema of Economic Miracles: Visuality and Modernization in the Italian Art Film* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

57 Epps discusses Palol in relation to Barcelona and the architecture of the 1990s (Epps, 'Modern spaces', p. 149). The book won the Premi Joan Creixells 1989, Premi Crítica Serra d'Or 1990, Premio Nacional de la Crítica 1990 and Premi Nacional de Literatura de la Generalitat de Catalunya 1990.

cognition, the traumatic real is visible in the removal of positive signifiers from Catalan space.

The analyses above only scratch the surface of *Fata Morgana*'s formal processes, which proliferate cinematic and art historical antecedents. The Barcelona School's films draw from an astonishing range of forms, including surrealism and art cinema, the Italian *giallo* and the French New Wave, pop art and the New American Cinema, architectural modernism and comic books. This promiscuity of influence forms a neat metonym of the Barcelona School's location, for it mediates the textual and the extratextual through form, geopolitics and historiography. The mixture of references can be read geographically as a demonstration of the European and outward-looking nature of Catalan culture.<sup>58</sup> The formal codes of surrealism or the *giallo* here articulate cultural politics, signifying Barcelona's status as a cosmopolitan and transnational space, connected to Paris, Rome and New York. The extratextual effect of this referentiality, however, is the illegibility of the School for film history. It cannot be easily located in Spanish cinema, or in the postwar avant garde, still less in commercial European cinemas. The references become illegible, and thus the films' encounter with European film history is condemned to miss.

It is here that a formal reading intervenes in this double bind, attending not just to the geographical origins of the references but to the textual location of their incoherence. The formal complexity of the School is not radical per se, but because it is unstable. There can be no positivist expression of Catalan identity, and even when mobilizing the Catalan culturalist discourse of Europeanism, *Fata Morgana* refuses to produce a clear discourse on place. Its political significance lies in what makes it difficult to read, and yet this is also what makes it such a poor model for nationalist or culturalist histories of cinematic production. It is in this illegibility that the Barcelona School makes a political claim on *catalanitat*. Catalan identity and oppression under Franco cannot be viewed directly, through realism. The particularities of Catalan space and subjectivity are not susceptible to such a direct approach, since Catalan identity in this period cannot operate simply as a positive term. Hence, *Fata Morgana* stages Catalonia as a missed encounter: as an experience that signifies only in so far as it is missed, and that bars the production of identity, both for the subject and the object of history. By framing Catalan space as traumatic, the film poses a traumatic *catalanitat* that is necessary and yet essentially unreachable. This revelatory missed encounter refracts across the body of the text and beyond, into the still dislocated location of the Barcelona School in the writing of Catalan cinema.

58 This argument is made by Kinder and Besas, among others.



## Introduction

ELIZABETH EZRA and JANE SILLARS

Michael Haneke's *Caché/Hidden* (2005) is a film that seems to generate endless discussion. Part thriller, part mystery, part ghost story, it seems to haunt people long after they see it, prompting them to talk about it to the point at which one would normally expect the interpretive possibilities to be exhausted – but still, new interpretations keep bubbling up, sometimes unbidden. And yet, although this film is certainly puzzling in many respects, it resists attempts to read it as a puzzle to be decoded. Perhaps it is compelling not because it has great deal to say (in the sense that its silences are just as informative as its utterances), but because it elicits an unusually wide range of responses from so many different perspectives.

Having found the film so generative ourselves, we were keen to extend this conversation and conceived of a collection of pieces drawn from writers with whom we had previously collaborated, or whose work we had drawn on or had simply admired from afar. In keeping with the film's transnational pedigree (Haneke is an Austrian director working in France and the film addresses the Franco-Algerian War and its aftermath), this dossier crosses boundaries, both geographical and disciplinary, and touches on questions of concern to fields of inquiry ranging from cultural, social and literary theory to film aesthetics, history, philosophy and psychoanalysis.

In the responses to the film that we have brought together in the following pages of this dossier, there are remarkable convergences of analysis, despite the wide range of critical perspectives and approaches to

the film, but there are also profound disagreements, both among the pieces, and with our own analysis. The divergent responses that *Caché* has elicited speak to the extraordinary breadth of the film's allegorical resonance and the variety of interpretations it can support.

In our own essay, '*Hidden in plain sight*', we examine the questions of how people look, and what they overlook, in relation to the dynamics of individual guilt and collective responsibility. We go on to consider the implications of the film's play with generic conventions and its repeated thwarting of audience expectation. Not only do we not learn 'whodunnit', but the film reveals this question to be beside the point. It is precisely the perspective of 'besideness', we argue, that the film dramatizes in its insistence upon pushing central events and expectations to the periphery, while situating the surface – and the ostensibly superficial – at its core.

Next, the writer and filmmaker Mark Cousins considers the film's appeal to audiences, arguing that Haneke's ability to mirror European bourgeois arthouse viewers back to themselves played a major role in the film's fortunes – not only with audiences but also at an industrial level through the response to the film by distributors and exhibitors. Cousins's argument that Haneke uses the audience as 'semiconductors' for the film's ideas makes interesting connections between different circuits of exchange – not only economic exchange but also that of ideas and interpretations – and adds a different dimension to the film's exploration of collusion. Martine Beugnet picks up the idea of *Caché* as a film that thinks in her exploration of the filmic apparatus and the attempt to unpick the hybrid technology and techniques that create Haneke's 'chilly vision' poised between cinema and video. She goes on to suggest that Haneke's own hybrid authorial identity – as the 'most French of Austrian directors' – offers an expansive and penetrating examination of forms of historical amnesia, not confined to French society, which is able to open up what Max Silverman elsewhere calls the 'disavowed unconscious life' hidden within our individual and social identities.

In contrast to the other contributors, Paul Gilroy argues that the film does not expose complicity but rather it acts as its conduit, offering a 'horrible accommodation' with political resignation. Gilroy's pithy and thought-provoking response to *Caché* condemns the film's two-dimensional characterization and its reliance on the whodunnit form as an 'elaborate exercise in mystification', whereas Ranjana Khanna, conversely, sees the investigative framework as a means of bringing to light what has been disavowed or repressed. Khanna proposes an instructive comparison with Poe's 'Rue Morgue', an early work of detective fiction, arguing that the story's emphasis on spectacular violence, diffuse responsibility, surveillance, intrusion, and non-human agency anticipates *Caché*'s investigation of unresolved questions of postcolonial guilt and uneasy implication.

Like Khanna, Max Silverman looks back to an earlier text – in this case, Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* – uncovering some uncanny echoes between Georges’s paranoid visions and the ‘imago of the Algerian’ that, according to Fanon, is constructed by the violence of the colonizer and then projected back onto the colonized. The piece casts light on the relation between past and present in the way the film’s childhood betrayal has embedded within it the greater, national secret of the French police massacre of 1961. Silverman goes on to argue that Haneke’s manipulation of the image tests the power of images to disturb the defensive, closed-off identity of the postcolonial subject. The conclusion of his piece, as that of the film, gestures forward to the future – the one space, in this age of constant surveillance and historical introspection, that can be said to remain truly hidden.

## ***Hidden* in plain sight: bringing terror home**

ELIZABETH EZRA and JANE SILLARS

In a world where turning a blind eye has become an art, Michael Haneke's 2005 *Caché/Hidden* explores the ways in which being made to look – and to think – can be experienced as forms of terror. Both fascinating and profoundly banal, it is a film about waiting and watching – and then not seeing what is right in front of you. The film's deceptively narrow depiction of a world of material privilege corroded by psychic unease opens up broader questions of the political deployment of fear and paranoid fantasy, and the dishonesties and displacements of postcolonialism. The film's narrative unfolds in a European city, showing us members of a bourgeois family who appear to have taken refuge behind the walls of their own home, yet who remain unable to shut out the past and their own feelings of paranoia and persecution. They see themselves as victims of a campaign of terror, which initially takes the form of videotapes pushed through the door. These tapes appear to show little more than the unexceptional surface of their everyday lives, yet they serve to unlock a secret from the past, a hidden story of colonial suffering – and in doing so expose the structures of oppression and complicity on which their lives are built.

One of the ironies of the dominant critical response to this film in the UK and the US has been the attempt to limit its exploration of colonial culpabilities to its French setting. In this, there seems to be a symptomatic acting out of the film's themes of displacement, avoidance and the refusal to look close to home. *Caché* forces us to think about what we allow inside and what we insist remains outside; the ways we psychologically, physically (and legislatively) construct and imagine the idea of 'home'. What does it mean to construct a home as a place of

safety, a refuge that shuts out the world, the past? What happens (on an individual and political level) when we invest in the paranoid fantasy of home as a fortress?

Certainly, both Georges (Daniel Auteuil) and Anne (Juliette Binoche) are depicted, visually at least, as prisoners of their own making, or at least of their own circumstances – a message that is encoded in the film's use of setting and costume. That the couple's stylish house is a gated fortress is driven home visually and sonically: the composition of shots of its exterior puts its vertical barred windows centre frame; horizontal bars cut across shots; the iron gate clangs. Georges's and Anne's grey, shapeless clothes are reminiscent of prison uniforms and have nothing of the chic glamour of outfits worn by French characters of their milieu in countless other contemporary films. These characters are shown literally behind bars, and bars, moreover, feature as part of the set of Georges's television programme (the chairs are encased in bars, and Georges is framed in bars when talking on the phone after taping). Some of the contributors to this dossier point out that the book-lined set of the literary programme mirrors Georges's and Anne's home, in which thousands of books, flatly lit and lining the walls, figure as decorative objects. Lacking in volume, apparently two-dimensional and with their titles obscured, these function more as blocks to the outside world than as prompts for meaningful reflection or exchange, or new ways of looking. We also see books piling up in the office of Georges's producer, who says he does not have time to read them. In this film, books cannot open up other perspectives or the past, because they are never opened. (They can only say 'nothing', one of the first words of the film.) On the television set, the glass table around which guests chat and sip water, as the books loom around and above them, is composed and shot to resemble the family dinner table, suggesting that the 'reality' of Georges's and Anne's life is, on some level, staged. When the outside world intrudes upon their carcereal existence, they attempt to banish it, just as Georges is shown editing out a discussion of the censorship of Rimbaud from his television programme – even discussion of censorship is censored if it is not part of the preordained 'script'. At the dinner party that Anne and Georges host, Georges awkwardly breaks into a discussion of mutual friends to ask about a script, and when the subject is changed he again attempts to steer the discussion back on to the script.

What is censored at the dinner party is a discussion of a friend's illness. It is mentioned that this friend, Simone, has been replaced in her husband's affections by a woman named 'Marianne', a name that Anne finds surprising (doubtless because it so transparently refers to the icon of French republicanism) and that is repeated three times to ensure that audiences make no mistake about its significance. Marianne is deemed to be very *sympa*, short for *sympathique*, or nice. Through their dinner party banter, the group of friends has collectively shifted attention away from the ill woman, whom one of the characters dismisses as someone she was 'never very close to anyway', on to someone whose name invokes the

French republican values of universalism and cultural integration, imposed legislatively, for example, by the banning of religious expression, such as the wearing of Muslim headscarves, in French schools. That which does not fit in, or which causes discomfort – vulnerability, need, difference – is banished from ‘polite’ (and political) society. The dinner party scene also comprises a literal shaggy dog story, which hooks its audience by means of a precise date (the only other clearly specified date that appears in the film being Georges’s citation of the police massacre of the Algerian protesters), and which suggests that historic events can come back to bite you, and can even, according to the storyteller, leave a scar. When someone asks if the story is true, everyone laughs, because that is not the point, just as the ontological status of the messages and the identity of the person making the videotapes in the film are not the point.

Instead, this set piece dramatizes the complicity of the audience in the construction of its narrative, whereas its content exposes the way the past continues to haunt and to traumatize the present. The form of the shaggy dog story further encapsulates the experience of watching the film, raising generic and narrative expectations with which audiences begin to engage, which are then thwarted when they realize that this film is not the whodunnit they bargained for, despite its formal nods to the filmic conventions of thriller, family melodrama and horror. After Georges witnesses Majid’s suicide, the first place he goes is to the cinema, where posters advertise the coming attractions: *Ma mère* (my mother – one of the adults responsible for sending Majid [Maurice Benijou] away), *Deux frères* (two brothers, or Georges and Majid), *La mauvaise éducation* (bad education – what Majid’s son informs Georges that Majid suffered as a result of being ejected from Georges’s family home) and *Mariages* (marriages – the family melodrama hinted at when Pierrot accuses his mother of having an affair with her colleague), which seem to spell out the various domestic and allegorical configurations in which Georges is implicated, as well as the various narrative and generic routes down which *Caché* as a film could have gone. Again the shift from the depiction of Majid’s suicide to Georges’s emergence from the cinema raises complex questions about the status of the scene between the two men that we have witnessed. Their first meeting shifts from a style of cross-cutting and multiple camera angles following their confrontation to a replay of the encounter shot from the fixed position of the unseen camera recording the videotapes, marking an apparent distinction between the event’s occurrence and its video replay. However, the scene of Majid’s suicide is shown only from the fixed camera, seen through the eye of the unseen observer. Not only does this reinforce the film’s repeated questioning of the status of the image – the nature and temporality of what is seen, the position and implication of the witness – it also lends a sense that Majid’s act is historically and ideologically over-determined, forced into being by the representational power of Georges’s fantasy, always already having happened.



*Caché* disrupts our expectations from the very beginning, when we learn that we have not been seeing what we had previously thought. In part, this disruption is effected through the construction of modes of articulation and of narrative progression that constantly double back, overlap and fast-rewind, disorienting the spectator. The extended opening shot (revealed eventually as the video footage of Georges's and Anne's house) breaks cinematic conventions through the length of take, the static camera and the increasingly insistent soundtrack of ambient noise. Already feeling uneasy, the viewer then sees the image freeze, speed up and spool forward. This questioning of the status of the image – both its temporality and its truth value – is repeated throughout *Caché*. The film insists on the need to look in different ways, and to listen. Georges's response to Anne's opening word – *Alors?* (So?) – *Rien* (Nothing) – is one that closes off inquiry and denies the possibility of meaning and one that recurs at key points in the film (Anne's and Georges's lines are reversed when the first drawing arrives; later, the lines are repeated in Georges's conversation with his mother). In place of other historical and psychological modes of exploration, Georges and Anne become fixated on discovering where the tape has been shot from – in other words, its geographical point of origin. Throughout the film they show themselves to be adept at reading maps: they quickly figure out the location of what turns out to be Majid's building, and they even have a relief map in their bathroom, as well as an abstract painting snaking across their living room walls that looks as though it is charting the course of a long river. This is perhaps because boundaries are so very important to them.

In Georges's and Anne's world, meaning is to be found on the surface: Pierrot's swimming coach urges him 'Less depth!', and, as Paul Gilroy notes in his piece here, the characters themselves are in many ways two-dimensional ciphers. But rather than read this depthlessness (particularly that of Majid) as one of the film's failings, we wish to suggest the possibility that it is being used as a diversionary tactic, like the adumbrated generic conventions that tempt and ultimately frustrate the viewer. In what is certainly the film's most self-conscious scene, in which Anne and Georges discuss Pierrot's disappearance while news of the Iraq War blares from the widescreen TV in the centre of the frame, the conventions of bourgeois melodrama and of classical realism compel viewers to attempt to shut out news of the outside world in order to focus on the apparent domestic crisis. The ease with which we fail to identify with (or even notice) real events, and the insistence we place on identifying with Georges and Anne, who are not particularly sympathetic characters and thus not easy to identify with, underscores the film's apparently perverse but ultimately effective interrogation of what John Berger famously called 'ways of seeing'.

The name of the street from which the surveillance of the house is conducted may indicate that there are other ways to read. The fact that this street is called the rue des Iris hints at an allegorical significance but,

as with so much in this film, it opens up a variety of readings. Clearly the dominant reference is to sight, as so much of the film's questioning of conventional interpretive strategies occurs on a visual level; but there may be a hint of Iris as the messenger goddess too (in Greek mythology, Iris, the goddess of the rainbow, carries messages to humanity from the gods communicating to the human plane from the non-human). Above all, the iris motif gestures to the 'iris' as an organic or manufactured optical device. Much of the cinema of looking, from *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954) to *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960), plays with the ambiguity of the eye as symbol: both looking out and shutting off the inside; penetrating yet vulnerable to penetration; an aperture to be opened and closed. Most of all, the iris motif indicates the ways in which the film is very much about opening one's eyes, and opening up the camera lens to new perspectives.

The most haunting perspective of all is the anonymous one that leaves us wondering just who is responsible for the videotapes. From whose unblinking viewpoint are we watching events unfold? Who is responsible for the crime? Just what is the crime, exactly? Who is the perpetrator and who the victim? Georges's 'crime' as a child is very different from his crime as an adult. A six-year-old child cannot be held responsible (certainly not legally speaking, and for many, ethically speaking as well) for his actions, however selfish these might be, and his motivation – not wanting to share what he sees as his – is an ordinary if unsavoury childhood impulse. The child's 'crime' cannot, therefore, be mapped easily onto France's colonial history, but Georges's refusal as an adult to acknowledge the effects of his earlier actions suggests a parallel with the postcolonial metropolitan who is neither wholly responsible for, nor wholly untainted by, past events from which he or she has benefited. The movements of history often transcend the role of the individual. This is why the question of 'whodunnit' is precisely the wrong question to ask of this film, and why viewers who insist on asking it are bound to be disappointed, because the individual cannot bear the full responsibility for history. Nonetheless, Georges's crime consists in taking this fact as licence to absolve himself of all responsibility, protesting repeatedly, 'I refuse to have a bad conscience'. He refuses to engage with history on any level.

*Caché* plays with spectatorial complicity (are we in control of, or controlled by, what we see?), in order to explore the nature of complicity itself, and the interface between individual and collective responsibility. The film repeatedly breaks the bounds of the individual, using Rimbaud's 'Je est un autre' (I is an other) as a point of departure for mapping domestic space onto social (civic or national) space. In contrast, cinema's dominant model of representing terrorism concentrates on its spectacular manifestations, leaving its causes marginalized. As such, it mirrors a political discourse that demands that we read acts of terror as coming from nowhere and signifying nothing beyond the 'evil' of those who commit them. *Caché* both participates in and dramatizes the mediation

- 1 We wish to thank Mark Brownrigg for this observation, and Tom Arah, Myra Macdonald, Stephanie Marriott and Bethan Benwell for illuminating discussion of the film.

between collective agency and the sets of structures in which individuals live, operate and turn a blind eye to what is going on around them. This blindness manifests itself in the midst of the post-spectacular, media-saturated society of surveillance, in which 'onlookers' routinely overlook their own responsibility as witnesses. For it is in this that the 'campaign of terror' against Georges consists: being made to look (at drawings, at video footage and, ultimately, at himself).

The final scenes in which we see Georges would appear to indicate that he is refusing the demand to see and to remember. He closes the heavy curtains of his bedroom, having taken two sleeping tablets (*cachets*, pronounced just like the title of the film). However, the scenes that follow suggest greater ambiguity. The tantalizing ending of the film can be read equally as a paranoid fantasy – Majid's son and Georges's son have conspired to make the tapes – or, as Max Silverman suggests, as a utopian fantasy – the next generation can work together to begin to undo the wrongs of the previous generation. Either way, Georges's and Anne's son, like Majid's son, will depart from the assumptions and practices of his parents' generation, a departure that is prefigured narratively when Pierrot goes missing, and decoratively, in the family home, when Anne confronts Georges about his lies while standing before three brass elephants of varying sizes, a mother and father separated from their child.<sup>1</sup> Majid's unnamed son seems to possess a social mobility denied to his father. While Majid only leaves his apartment when forcibly removed by the police, his son takes his questions to Georges at the television station. In this institutional centre of French cultural life, he enters unhindered, moving across a series of thresholds where Georges attempts to stall him: the lift door, the inner office, even the lavatories. Majid's son is shown to be able to challenge Georges's actions and his refusal to face the past and his own responsibilities.

For Georges is not only made to see, he is also made to listen. In the film's opening shot of Georges's and Anne's house, we hear what is apparently the ambient sound of birdsong. This birdsong seems at first to be little more than noise, in the way, perhaps, that the television broadcasting news of world events, including the occupation of Iraq, at first seems like 'noise' competing with Anne's and Georges's increasingly frantic dialogue about their missing son. The French word for white noise is '*le parasite*', appropriately suggesting the invasion of a host, which is also invoked when Majid invites Georges into his home to watch him commit suicide (though in an inversion of the figure of the immigrant as 'guest' in debates about postcolonial 'hospitality' currently raging in France), and again in Georges's claim at the film's close that he may have caught a virus. What initially seems like white noise, however, turns out to be very significant. The birdsong from the film's opening shot is identical to the birdsong in the penultimate scene, the flashback to Georges's boyhood home when the young Majid is taken away by force; in the farmyard, we see chickens but we hear sparrows. In fact, the soundtrack in these two scenes sounds the same (including footsteps

crunching and car doors slamming) but for one thing: Majid's screams have been removed from the opening shot. When Georges replays the scene in his mind's eye at the end of the film, after having witnessed the adult Majid's suicide, he finally allows himself to hear the violence of the past, which manages to break through not only the birdsong, which becomes louder and louder, but also Georges's own psychic barriers. The cries Georges hears may also be interpreted as an expression of his own feelings – not the pain of victimization, which belongs solely to Majid – but the shame of having suppressed the memory of Majid's cries, and his own role in eliciting them. The cries in this scene not only show the leakage of the past into the present, they also remind us that while collective responsibility creates the possibility of the avoidance of guilt, shame – that intense, hidden, individual emotion – can reconnect us to that guilt. Shame has the power to animate history and to reveal to us our part in it.

## After the end: word of mouth and *Caché*

MARK COUSINS

After the press screening the day before the world premiere of *Caché*, it was already clear that the film, through its ambiguous narrative construction, was one of those that gets you talking, and keeps you talking for days afterwards. At such screenings in Cannes, the world's press usually ambles out, blinking, into the sunshine, but when the lights went up after *Caché* there was an immediate hubbub. Urgent clusters formed. The screening had caused a build-up of pressure in the auditorium – pressure to talk.

What we discussed in those first moments in May 2005 is what audiences have talked about since – the last shot of the film and the implications of the position of the camera at the moment when Majid slits his throat. The former because crucial plot information was apparently hidden within the background activity of the image; the latter because of whose point of view the shot seemed to represent. These two shots called to each other across the second half of the movie or, rather, called us to reconcile them towards, or after, the final reel. We tried to do so, as did, when the film was released, about 600,000 people in the USA and more than 200,000 in the UK, to name just two of the territories in which the film 'overperformed'.

There is nothing new in audiovisual culture causing social conversation, of course. Often in the analogue age, as with the 'Who Shot JR?' speculation about the television show *Dallas* (Lorimar/Warner TV,

tx March 1980 in the USA), a conventional narrative suture was driven and enforced by mass media, to their enormous financial gain, and the conversation was about whodunnit and why. A decade later, *Twin Peaks* (Lynch/Frost Productions, 1989–91), the speculation was not about a single withheld secret – the identity of the killer – but the nature of the world being betrayed, its surreal characters and repetitions. Still on television, ABC's *Lost* (2005–) combines the diffuse intrigue of *Twin Peaks* with the manufactured social conversation of *Dallas*, this time across multiple platforms, thereby allowing teenagers online and daytime television viewers, for example, to enter socially separate forums of conjecture.

Films in general, especially non-studio, non-native-language films with limited distribution budgets, find it far more difficult than television, with its far larger audiences and ongoing presence, to activate social conjecture. When *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, 1992) did so, the talking point was partially about the hidden secret (the gender of Dil, played by Jaye Davidson), but also about the implications that secret had for the relationship between Dil and Fergus (Stephen Rea). Here, as in the case of *Twin Peaks*, was ongoing *bouche-à-oreille* that started, rather than ended, when the secret was revealed. Subsequent films that created social conversation, such as *Ringu* (Hideo Nakata, 1998), *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez, 1999), *The Passion of the Christ* (Mel Gibson, 2004) and *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005), did so as a result of genre innovations rather than because they posed sophisticated questions about dramaturgy or ontology.

The case of *Caché* is intriguing in this context. As with the above films and television programmes, it electrified particular social networks. It made certain types of people and groupings semiconductors for its suture, mystery and anxieties. What types of people? What did they conduct and why?

An anecdote begins to answer the first question. A UK distributor and an English owner of cultural cinemas separately told me that *Caché* did well in the UK (it took more than a million pounds on twenty-six screens) because, in addition to universally good reviews and elements of a thriller narrative, it has dinner parties in it. Not only did it intrigue, but it featured people whose social lives are organized like those of the middle-class, urban, ideas-aware groups that journalists dismissively call the chattering classes and which Jurgen Habermas would see in more enlightened terms. *Caché* held a mirror up to such socio-intellectual networks and showed them anxieties which, to them, were unexpected, clever and stimulating.

Though only an anecdote, it would be unwise to underestimate the sense that cinema owners and distributors get about a film by watching who goes in to the screening, hearing what they say in the auditorium on the way out and clocking the daily box-office figures in cinemas serving urban elites. On its UK release, *Caché* became an element in the ongoing process in which ideas-aware elite metropolitan groupings signified to



each other that they were up to date, surfing the intellectual *Zeitgeist*, engaged with forms of cinema that were other than pacifying, in ways that were other than reactive. If this is the case, then the real suturing of these audiences (the key scene in the film) is the dinner party hosted by Anne and Georges in which they first share their anxieties about the videotape stalking that is unsettling their lives. The scene is one of release. Their social family is in place, their communing ritual has begun and they begin to ease their disquiet into the situation, onto the table as it were. In psychoanalytic terms, it is a scene of attempted and apparent transference from twin analysand to group analyst. So familiar and relied upon is this kind of social-psychoanalytic cure for each of them that Anne and Georges seem more comfortable in its process than they are together, alone. Their distress finds its most comfortable mise-en-scene there, at the table.

To say this, to see this dinner party scene as central to *Caché* and the moment that locks its audience to it, is to begin to agree with one of the more familiar readings of director Michael Haneke's work since *Funny Games* (1997) – that he is the great disconcertor of European metropolitan elites; that he maltreats them in his films (or the city-worlds they have created for themselves maltreat them) and that they like it. Is this true in the case of *Caché*? In all those real-life dinner parties, reflections of the dinner parties in Haneke's films, was masochism the underscore? Unlike in the case of *Funny Games*, or *Code inconnu* (2000), it is difficult to detect such an underscore in *Caché*. Haneke is surely right when he says that if, when we leave the auditorium, we are asking *who did it*, we are asking the wrong question, and that we should, instead, be asking about the nature of colonial guilt. But is this exactly what happens after seeing *Caché*? Certainly, at that first screening in Cannes, the question was not, at least initially, a moral and national-memory one. It was a compound narrative-aesthetic one – who was there in the final moments of the film and – for me – the *non*-narrative (that is, philosophical) implication of the position of the suicide scene camera.

In other words, *Caché* does not discomfit as much as Haneke thinks. In Britain, at least, this is partially because the colonial guilt on display is so French. Viewers in the dwindling British empire are not encouraged to see their national guilt in Georges's distress, just his and his wife's social situation. The film does not go further and *deflect* a reading that would see the Georges/French crime as similar to other colonial crimes but, I believe, nor does it provide even space – passive occasions – for a thought connection between 'their' crimes and 'ours'.

Instead, its provocation, the pressure cooker effect it creates during viewing, the need to speak that it creates, is not confessional ('we did those things too'), nor – if Haneke is right – purely narrative ('was that the two sons on the steps at the end? If so does that mean they were both sending the videotapes and drawings?'), but philosophical. Where *Dallas* made people ask 'who?', *Twin Peaks* 'what?', the genre-bending films of the last decade 'how?' and *The Crying Game* was about the implications

of the answer, *Caché*'s conversational buzz was more circular. Yes, we asked 'who?' Then, when it was clear that this question was not answered by the film, we considered *why* it was not answered. The answer was, among other things, because of 'impossible' camera positions. The suicide was seen by a fake or non-existent observer, the film itself used an aesthetic code which in this case did not mean what it usually does – though we only figure this out later, and many only figure it out *after* the later, in the table-talk of their lives, which is enjoyably like the table-talk in the film but less uneasy. The film structures our experience in a generically gripping way but then the structure melts away at the moment when it should most cohere, requiring us to look back along its length (the structure's length and the film's) to work out where we went wrong.

But we did not go wrong. We went where we were told to go, we took the hand of the narrative that, in the final stages, slipped away, leaving us without co-ordinates. This, I believe, is why *Caché* made conversational waves. John Sayles attempted a similar thing in *Limbo* (1999), a filmic 'you're on your own'. *Caché* did not compel us to work out the implications of the answer, but the implications of the question. Why am I prepared to fall for the generic intrigue of a thriller? What was the film thinking at each stage of the story? How do its thoughts relate to my own? What happens when I realize that its thoughts were not what I thought they were and, therefore, the connection between its and mine that seemed to take place and develop in the course of viewing must, in retrospect, near the end of the movie, or after the end, in conversations, be disconnected and untangled? This is what happened at those mirror-image dinner parties: cognitive disentanglement. In talking about *Caché*, people withdrew from the dilemmas into which it had drawn them. The opposite, in other words, of what Anne and Georges ended up doing. They, Anne and Georges, thought they were offloading anxiety, but they were not. We were.

## Blind spot

MARTINE BEUGNET

The opening images of *Caché* encapsulate everyday, middle-class ordinariness: shot in fixed frame, the unblinking long take shows the façade of a comfortable-looking house partly hidden behind a thick privet hedge. After a while, a passer-by crosses the frame, then a cyclist. The door opens and closes as a woman leaves the house. When no human presence is in sight, only the slight shiver of leaves in the left-hand corner indicates that the shot is live. For all the image's reassuring dullness, Haneke's aesthetics of dread is already at work, permeating the image through the claustrophobic effect of its immobile gaze and thwarted perspective: on each side of the frame, the end of a street narrows the confines of the view; at the back of the house, a row of tall buildings blocks the entire perspective – rows of anonymous windows gazing back at the camera.

Breaking a long-lasting silence (films on France's 'dirty war' were censored at the time and there have been few since), a number of films of the Algerian war by French filmmakers have been released recently (such as *Mon Colonel* [Laurent Herbier, 2006], *La Trahison* [Philippe Faucon, 2005] and *19 Octobre 1961* [Alain Tasma, 2005]). These films often describe the complex situation of the alienated protagonists of a dirty conflict, inviting identification with unexceptional men and women torn between contradictory allegiances. In comparison, Haneke's treatment stands out for the chilly vision that the instrumentation of the film and video apparatus creates. Is it Haneke's hybrid identity as a director – as the most French of Austrian filmmakers, at the cross between two

- 1 Max Silverman, 'Horror and the everyday in post-Holocaust France: *Nuit et Brouillard* and concentrationary art', *French Cultural Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2007), p. 12.

- 2 Ibid., pp. 7, 13–4.

national cultures known for their propensity to historical amnesia – that gives him the necessary detachment to scrutinize his characters like an entomologist?

I would suggest that to account for the effect of the disincarnated presence (this 'body without organs' to use Artaud and Deleuze's phrase) that the film's apparatus creates, merely in terms of the sadistic inclination of a demiurgic filmmaker intent on manipulating his audience, is to dismiss the more unsettling effect created by the film: the inscription of trauma, via the video image, in the body of the film itself.

In his account of filmmaking as a form of 'Lazaréen art', Max Silverman draws on Jean Cayrol's writings to describe the emergence of a new aesthetic vision based on 'the interplay between everyday life and horror', where the presence of the most mundane of objects can reveal the existence of a 'disavowed unconscious life (both psychic and social) into the normalized and commodified appearance of the everyday'.<sup>1</sup>

Noting the connection, in Alain Resnais's 1955 work, between the Holocaust and the unspoken advent of the Algerian war, Silverman stresses the complexity involved in the elaboration of a new aesthetic in terms that are highly resonant in the context of Haneke's latest feature: the new direction envisaged in Cayrol's post-Holocaust aesthetic vision is neither that of an 'immanentist' art (reducing everything to the same postmodern flattening of effect and conflation of surface and depth) nor a Manichean art (maintaining the boundaries between opposites) but one that is sensitive to the play between similarity and difference, reference and transformation and hence 'genuinely troubling to us all'.<sup>2</sup>

In *Caché*, the object that reconnects the present with a disavowed past may be the image itself – or, rather, the video image. Once held as the benevolent companion of middle-class familial history, in Haneke's work, video becomes the obstinate witness to the everyday denial of intolerable realities and memories. Here, its gaze is not associated with its benign expressions – the endearing unsteadiness of home movies or the roaming, intimate cinematic style and fluid camera work characteristic of many of the 1990s feature films shot in DV – but with the objectifying, mechanical yet voyeuristic stare of the surveillance camera.

In this delicate exercise, the enigmatic gaze of the victim of historical amnesia initially comes to resemble the 'fixed and objectified framing' of the oppressor. Yet Haneke also draws on the specific qualities of the HD video image to elaborate an 'aesthetic of amnesia' that effectively denounces a pervasive process of disavowal and stasis aimed at countering the disturbing and dynamic effect of suffering and change.

'Blind spot': the expression aptly describes the treatment of the massacre of 1961 – the event that brought the Algerian war to metropolitan France – and how, until recently, the circumstances of the death of over two hundred people, who had come to march peacefully in Paris in support of the FLN (Front de Libération Nationale), have remained unspoken. Some of the bodies, thrown into the Seine, were

never found. The expression also applies to the apparatus devised by Haneke to probe the covert effect of the silence and guilt generated, beyond the official censorship, by a nation's collective and individual amnesia.

A well-to-do French family living in a comfortable suburb of Paris is being filmed by a mysterious, hidden observer. This enigmatic presence forces successful literary journalist Georges to revisit forgotten childhood memories and, in particular, forces him to confront the way he brought about the rejection of a six-year-old Algerian orphan whom his parents had been ready to adopt.

The simple and effective device that triggers the story – a series of tapes left on the doorstep – recalls the premiss of another film in which video is the initial means for an exploration of what lurks behind the acceptable surface of everyday life – *Lost Highway* (1997) by David Lynch, himself a master of the depiction of existential unease. While Haneke's aims are more precise in their political underpinning, he similarly revels in exploring the ambiguity of the moving image: the medium of presence is also the medium of absence. 'In spite of the logic of the Euclidian time-space, here, the Mystery Man expresses himself from elsewhere. . . . to go beyond the alternation presence/absence, to play on co-existence (*ibi* and *alibi* combined or reversible) suspends identity'.<sup>3</sup>

In effect, patterns of identification in *Caché* are irremediably blurred from the start. Unravelling on the first images, the film's opening credits create an additional element of familiarity and distance for the spectator. As the images suddenly fast forward a few minutes later, however, those who first discover the film in its DVD version will probably reach for the remote control, thus unwittingly mimicking the actions of the characters, viewers of the film within the film. At the same time, the point of view initially presented to us is that of the anonymous author of the video, but even if we are made to adopt the mysterious observer's position, his or her identity will never be fully ascertained diegetically. Most crucially, the spot from which the images are shot will not be seen. Georges does venture out of his house looking for it and vaguely gestures towards an unseen location, yet the counter-shot never takes place.

Images from the anonymous videos are shown on a flat screen, installed in designer fashion in the centre of the shelves that line the walls of the family living room with an imposing collection of books, videos and DVDs. The video images thus appear literally 'embedded' within the rows of books and films, whose meaning and function they soon call into question: this is a cultivated couple's house (he is the presenter of a literary television programme, she is a book editor) in which texts and images have seemingly lost their power to question, but serve instead as a buffer against the intrusion of unedited external reality. In a similar fashion, the backlit set of Georges's television programme is made up of elegantly patterned rows of replica books – mere props that do not even have titles. As they leave the stage at the end of the show, the silhouettes

3 Guy Astic, 'Call me!: L'Appel des profondeurs? – *Lost Highway* de David Lynch', *Simulacres*, no. 1 (1999), p. 126.

- 4 Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1999), p. 196.

of Georges and his assistant producer are outlined against this background like ghostly figures.

The video image does not so much 'puncture' through this cloak, but rather weaves itself into it, and reveals it for what it is. Cinema's 'inferior' double thus makes its way not only into the diegesis, at the heart of the educated, upper-middle-class home, but into the body of the film itself. At the beginning, when the film first takes us back and forth from the virtual (images of the street shot a few hours before) to the actual (Georges exploring the same street, looking for traces of the mysterious observer), the latter sequences, shot at dusk, appear drained of light, as if vampirized by their video *doppelgänger*.

The result of Haneke choosing to shoot the whole feature in High Definition format is not merely a surface play on the virtual and the actual aimed at building up suspense. It allows for the elaboration of a vision dominated by the numbing power of amnesia – a vision that is not only suited to the film's premiss, but disturbingly characteristic of present-day aesthetics. As we penetrate the house and watch those who inhabit it, it is a universe of rarefied contrasts, soft edges and flattened perspective, a world governed by stasis and the need to relegate the 'contingent and the accidental – the historical, in a word – to the exterior' that emerges.<sup>4</sup> The house's comfortable, tasteful environment functions like an autarchic space, theatrical in the way that it denies depth of field and superimposes muted, controlled variations of beige, brown and grey. Like the domestic space, the workplace is a world of surface effects, mirrors and transparent facades, faintly suffused by an overall greyness and as ultimately depthless as the televised image which it produces.

As the virtual and the actual become enmeshed, it is not, in the more poetic Deleuzian fashion, the past that comes to haunt the present but, rather, almost simultaneous presents that overlap in an uncanny fashion, creating, in the image of the fast-forward effect, 'ripples' on the smooth surface of a comfortable, amnesiac existence.

It is images from a different visual regime that suggest that the events are having a deeper effect on Georges: the dream sequences, the only moments where the past – memory or fantasized reminiscence – resurfaces, are conveyed with the depth of field and visual lyricism that is denied to the rest of the film. In the end, however, we watch him draw the curtains, take a sleeping pill and go to bed: an emphatic way of signifying the closure of an episode, the return to normality – the conclusion of the film. Yet the images 'refuse' to comply: behind the closing credits, the questioning gaze not only persists but affirms its capacity to reinvent itself.

Writing about what he calls the *cinéastes-artistes*, among whom he includes Haneke, Stéphane Bouquet underlines the reductive tendency to subject the creative process to an *a priori* ruling principle:

First and foremost, their films grow out of an external principle (an idea, a formal bias, an aesthetic device, a Dogma for instance). . . . This

5 Stéphane Bouquet, 'De Sorte que tout communique', first published in *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 527 (1998), reprinted in *Théories du cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2001), p. 204 (my translation).

6 Stéphane Rehm, 'Juste sous la surface: *Caché* de Michael Haneke', *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 605 (2005), p. 31 (my translation).

7 Silverman, 'Horror and the everyday', p. 14.

8 Anne Dufourmantelle, *Blind Date: Sexe et Philosophie* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2003), cited in Robert Maggiori, 'Ne pense qu'à ça', *Libération*, 9 October 2003, p. viii.

is the ultimate truth of an art that substitutes the idea for the world and has to adapt the latter to the first. . . . The real world, inasmuch as it contains the promise of the heterogeneous, the other and the accidental, can only be experienced as threatening.<sup>5</sup>

With *Caché*, both the artificiality of the device that underpins the film's dramatic and formal organization and the fact that similar strategies were already at work in the director's previous films (which are alluded to throughout *Caché*) raised the suspicions of those critics who dismissed the film as yet another exercise in sadistic mise-en-scene. (As *Cahiers du cinéma*'s reviewer has it, 'Like a sadistic child playing with images, Haneke conceals himself, recreating himself as a nightmare for adults'.<sup>6</sup>) On the one hand, however, here, the autarchic dimension created by the film arguably functions as an effective *mise en abyme*: Bouquet's account neatly describes Georges's world as much as Haneke's aesthetic stratagem. On the other hand, Haneke undoubtedly stands among those contemporary filmmakers for whom the medium of the moving image, in the multiple appearances afforded by present-day technology and visual strategies, is not merely a play on representation but an actual process of thought: contemporary realities are thus thought through the operations of film itself, and refracted through the prism of a specific aesthetic vision. (Implicit in *Caché* is also Haneke's acknowledgement of the limitations of his gesture: the gruesome scene of self-immolation by which Georges is confronted is followed by a direct cut to a shot where we see him leave a cinema.) Even if Haneke appears, more than ever, to tread close to the 'easy finger-pointing exercise', I would contend that *Caché* also offers, in Silverman's words, a 'genuinely troubling self-examination for us all'.<sup>7</sup> In the end, the issue lies in the interstice between the emotional force of some of the video footage (such as the forlorn figure of a solitary man crying disconsolately), and the numbing process made visible through the aesthetics of amnesia. Does the emotion which Haneke, in his vision of middle-class France, repeatedly fends off, reach us, the spectators? Emotion – "the signature of the other", the sign, precisely, "that there is an other and that this other can reach us"<sup>8</sup>.



## Shooting crabs in a barrel

PAUL GILROY

*Caché* is a positively disturbing film. I have had many rich and stimulating conversations about it and I have appreciated the insistent dialogue it provoked. The value of those conversations also made it difficult to ask for more from the cinematic experience than Michael Haneke offers. However, my intense reaction against his film is also worth exploring briefly here. I felt hostile towards what felt like the film's horrible accommodation with many of the things that it appears, at first sight, to be criticizing. This was not so much a clever study of audience complicity, regression or resignation, but rather a conduit for those depressing reactions served up with what looks like bad faith. The film seemed to offer only a shallow, pseudopolitical, or perhaps more accurately an antipolitical, engagement with profound contemporary problems that deserve – or demand – better treatment than an elaborate exercise in mystification can provide.

What I took to be an overly casual citation of the 1961 anti-Arab pogrom by Papon's police in Paris encapsulated some of these problems. That unmentioned and unremembered real event does a lot of narrative work for Haneke. Many people involved in building a habitable multicultural Europe will feel that there are pressing issues of morality and responsibility involved in raising that history only to reduce it to nothing more than a piece of tragic machinery in the fatal antagonism that undoes *Caché's* protagonists. The dead deserve better than that passing acknowledgement. That belated recognition contributes to the

negative labour involved in building a Europe, which can be reconciled to, and emancipated from, the history of its colonial crimes.

The radical interdependency that characterizes Europe's multicultural cities, the memory and history of France's colonial wars, the continuing debasement of an information-saturated public sphere, the depletion of the bourgeois household and the problems of individual agency involved in being a moral actor in the age of rendition are all important topics worthy of careful consideration. They are rarely linked together. It is all the more unusual to discover a work of art in which racism and the pressure of unresolved colonial violence on the present contribute to the framework through which we are invited to consider their articulation. There is more to all of these urgent matters than the perfidy and shallowness of privileged postmodern Parisians, figured here as an empty exercise akin to the task of shooting crabs in a barrel.

Although there is technical novelty in Haneke's presentation of it, the landscape of Georges's fractured subjectivity is very well trodden ground. When the Majids of this world are allowed to develop into deeper, rounded characters endowed with all the psychological gravity and complexity that is taken for granted in ciphers like Georges, we will know that substantive progress has been made towards breaking the white, bourgeois monopoly on dramatizing the stresses of lived experience in this modernity.

In view of *Caché*'s obvious strengths, I was particularly troubled by what could be interpreted as Haneke's collusion with the comforting idea that the colonial native can be made to disappear in an instant through the auto-combustive agency of their own violence. If this reading of Majid's suicide sounds rather too literal, I am prepared immediately to concede that his death represents a step forward from older modernist explorations of the psychological and philosophical ambiguities involved in murdering Arabs, but his eventful sacrifice belongs on ground from which all varieties of political reflection are doomed to disappear. Some years ago, Volker Schlöndorff's *Circle of Deceit* (1981) was consumed by similar conceits. Getting the Arabs to do away with themselves is a timely fantasy in the context of today's pervasive Islamophobia. In that light Majid's suicide becomes in effect an exclusively aesthetic event, devoid of all meaning apart from what it communicates about Georges. Haneke's unsettled audience can even derive a deep if guilty pleasure from it precisely because that horrible death can represent a flowering of their own investments in the idea that Europe's immigrants should be induced to disappear by any means possible.

The same aestheticism is built into the misplaced tactic of casting the core narrative as a kind of detective story or whodunit. The modernist warrant supporting that choice is a worthy one. Indeed, this dimension of the film accomplishes the classic trick of interruption. It simultaneously solicits and forbids interpretation. The thwarting of resolution can be instructive, but here it arouses the suspicion that form and phenomenology are more significant than fidelity to the broken world.

The revolutionary and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon once misquoted Nietzsche as saying that ‘Man’s tragedy is that he was once a child’. That phrase, which is used to illuminate what Fanon called the sociogenesis of racial hierarchy, echoed in my mind as I tried to make sense of the notion that the young Georges – who had lied to his parents in order to engineer the expulsion of his rival from their household – was a culpable moral actor. In what sense are the unintended consequences of his juvenile decision his own responsibility? The horrible shallowness of the adult Georges supplies the context in which that act is interpreted as a prefiguration of his later duplicity, but can and should the child Georges be held to account in that way? This confusion is important. The relationship of the colonial past to the postcolonial present is perverted and confused by the idea that today’s complacent and indifferent adults bear no more responsibility for their resignation, inertia and poisonous choices than a conflicted six year old. The unhelpful effects of this rather convenient cop-out are compounded by several other implicit suggestions. Are the structures of Georges’s own personality, his unhappy household and his divided nation all homologically configured? Are the guilt, denial and repression that operate in each of those spaces in the same essential shape and tempo? Are the same kind of pathological results produced in each of those settings? For a film which seems to offer a small fragment of liberating hope in the closing shots, in which some kind of mysterious amity between Pierrot and Majid’s son suggests that they may have evaded the patterns established by the previous generation, the refusal to allow the child Georges a similar access to a hopeful innocence is jarring.

Since Fanon, we have known that colonialism brings out the worst in everyone it touches. *Caché* offers precious little beyond that simple insight. We leave the theatre jolted but with no clear sense of how to act more justly or ethically. Instead, Haneke invites his audience to become resigned to its shame, discomfort and melancholia. These are the inescapable effects of an overarching historical Leviathan that becomes intelligible only through interpersonal conduct. This tragic machinery defies the desire for control. The old twentieth-century message, namely that there is relief only in the dubious pleasures of atelic art, is repeated. Another world, it would seem, is not possible.

## From Rue Morgue to Rue des Iris

RANJANA KHANNA

<sup>1</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, 'The murders in the Rue Morgue', in *Edgar Allan Poe Stories: Twenty Seven Thrilling Tales by the Master of Suspense with an Added Selection of his Best Poems* (New York, NY: Platt and Munk, 1961), pp. 161–214.

<sup>2</sup> The issue of frame narrative in Poe's works has been extensively discussed by Marie Bonaparte, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Barbara Johnson and others in John P. Muller and William J. Richardson (eds), *The Purloined Poe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> Poe, 'The murders in the Rue Morgue', p. 166.

The 'Rue Morgue' of my title refers to an 1841 detective story by Edgar Allan Poe entitled 'The murders in the Rue Morgue'.<sup>1</sup> The story entails the detection of a non-human murderer. Dealing with the relation between animality and criminality, the crux of the plot involves audible but ambiguous animal cries that give no articulate testimony, but suggest pure affect and the difficulty of distinguishing an animal cry from a word uttered in a foreign language. If the mysterious world of detective fiction dominated Poe's Rue Morgue and the 'extraordinary murders' that took place there with the aid of a razor slash to the throat, it is rather the absence of detection that shapes Haneke's Rue des Iris in a disturbing thriller without a clear-cut crime (but nonetheless with a cut to the throat). The key question that confronts Haneke's film is the following: what, exactly, is *caché*?

There are two frame narratives to Poe's story.<sup>2</sup> The first involves a treatise on analytical powers and on the ingenuity of calculation that requires careful observation and the employment of memory. The second tells us of the relationship between our narrator and his unstoppable protagonist, C. Auguste Dupin, an avid reader and observer of all details, such that at times he can mind-read. 'Books . . . were his sole luxuries, and in Paris these are easily obtained'.<sup>3</sup> We soon come to understand, as we move into the main body of the story, that he is also an expert in reading the signs of a crime without attributing any particular motive to the logical connections that link these signs together. Dupin pieces together a possible narrative out of the resources available in the newspaper story that initiates the plot. Immediately, detection is associated with reading and with adequate interpretive skills. Dupin demonstrates that the sounds described in the testimonies given, rather than the assumed meanings of those sounds and stories, is essential.

4 Ibid., p. 188.

5 My understanding of voice has been shaped by Mladen Dolar's *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006.)

6 Poe, 'The murders in the Rue Morgue', p. 190–1.

7 Ibid., pp. 210, 212.

8 Ibid., p. 174.

Eschewing a content-driven explanation, Dupin allows for the possibility of an arbitrary murder rather than a carefully plotted one. The human associated with the crime may not be directly guilty. However, as Dupin says, 'I am now awaiting a person who, although perhaps not the perpetrator of these butcheries, must have been in some measure implicated in their perpetration. Of the worst portion of the crimes committed, it is probable that he is innocent.'<sup>4</sup> This unwitting accomplice to the crime is a swarthy Mediterranean sailor from Malta. He is guilty, by association, of a larger economic crime than the one for which he may stand trial. Meanwhile, the aptly named M. Le Bon has been wrongly accused of the sailor's crime. The main perpetrator of the crime first manifests itself not through any visual evidence but through voice as evidence.<sup>5</sup> Various witnesses report that they heard screams and then two voices – one gruff and the other shrill. The gruff voice (ultimately revealed to be that of the Maltese sailor) seems to have uttered 'Mon Dieu'. Witnesses of different European nations and national languages claim the second voice sounded foreign, and each conjectures that it was a European language, but one that they did not know. 'How strangely unusual must that voice have really been, about which such testimony as this could have been elicited! – in whose tones, even, denizens of the five great divisions of Europe could recognise nothing familiar! You will say that it might have been the voice of an Asiatic – of an African. Neither Asiatics nor Africans abound in Paris.'<sup>6</sup> The foreign voice (which we too may have suspected was from the Antilles, La Réunion or Algeria, given the time frame and process of elimination in the story and its other colonial references) is revealed ultimately to be that of a non-human, an orangutan, in fact. Voice as distinct from language becomes the crucial marker of the trace of the animal rather than the human. Dupin identifies the beast through his reading of Cuvier, and through the beast from Borneo's digital calling-card, its finger or paw prints, which continue to exist beyond the presence of the animal itself, and which can be understood through a technology of reading the evidence. The orangutan's agency was also revealed by non-human agility and strength, which Dupin deduced from the escape route and the bodily marks left by the ferocity of the attack.

In imitation of a human and in the process of losing its animal nature, the orangutan committed a shocking violence as it cut the older woman's throat. The beast went into a frenzy at the sight of spurting blood. ('Razor in hand, and fully lathered, it (the orangutan) was sitting before a looking-glass, attempting the operation of shaving, in which it had no doubt previously watched its master through the key-hole of the closet. . . . (It) was flourishing the razor about her face, in imitation of the motions of a barber. . . .')<sup>7</sup> Other pieces of visual evidence proved apparently incidental: 'Napoleons, an ear-ring of topaz, three large silver spoons, three smaller of *métal d'Alger*, and two bags, containing nearly four thousand francs in gold',<sup>8</sup> all bear the traces of colonial encounter, but their significance to the crime is not directly relevant, unless, that is,

one reads the presence of the orangutan as part of this same colonial machinery that would 'implicate' the colonial endeavour and those who perpetuate it without directly supplying clues for the immediate crime at hand. However, the scenario and all the suspicions involved speak to a world of global encounter, empire and the riches and prejudices which accompanied it.

So why start with Poe to think about Haneke's 2005 film *Caché*? There are perhaps a few obvious parallels. The two most shocking images of ferocity in the movie involve an animal and a reference to one. The child Majid's beheading of the cockerel is represented in Georges's dream as a threatening act. Majid is covered with blood and carries a disproportionately sized axe that becomes the threatening weapon, which, in turn, could be wielded against him (the boy Georges). The other most shocking image in the film is that of spurting blood from the suicidal adult Majid's neck. This spurt of blood references the dream, and Majid's rapid twisted fall to the floor reduces him to body, and reveals his life to be almost non-human, like the severed body of the cockerel. He is little more than the trace of the disappearing human. Indeed, his movements show less life than even the headless cockerel, which seems to have the power to shock in Georges's dream world for longer than Majid the man. Whereas for Poe the trace of the animal seems to reference the foreigner, for Haneke, the animal becomes the trace of the human and the foreigner. Akira Lippit importantly reminds us of Adorno's suggestion that:

Indignation over cruelty diminishes in proportion as the victims are less like normal readers, the more they are swarthy, 'dirty', dago-like. This throws as much light on the crimes as on the spectators. . . . The mechanism of 'pathic projection' determines that those in power perceive as human only their own reflected image, instead of reflecting back the human as precisely what is different. Murder is thus the repeated attempt, by greater madness, to distort the madness of such false perception into reason: what was not seen as human and yet is human, *is made a thing*, so that its stirrings can no longer refute the manic gaze.<sup>9</sup>

Lippit explains that:

The ethics of murder is made possible by seeing the animal first as nonhuman, then inhuman. If one's victim can be seen as inhuman, the aggressor reasons, one is then justified in performing acts of violence, even murder upon that inhuman body, since those acts now fall beyond the jurisdiction of the anthropocentric law.<sup>10</sup>

The inhuman, as the trace of the animal, is dropped into the film again and again. The inhuman and the animal are drawn together through pathic projection, and the affective side of the human that itself is like an automaton, sets the human aside from itself. Pierrot, the son of Anne and Georges, reads *Chien-de-la-lune*, and at a dinner party, the guests are

9 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), p. 105.

10 See Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 168–9.

regaled with a story of an old woman who believes that one of these very guests was the reincarnation of her disappearing animal, the dog. The affect associated with her memory, and with others', is the trace of the non-human projected onto a human figure, itself in the process of disappearing.

The apparently arbitrary evidence found scattered around the apartment of Madame and Mademoiselle Espanaye in Poe's story reveals another connection between the story and the film. The miscellaneous evidence in the apartment in the Poe story contains the spoons of *métal d'Alger* – a tin-lead alloy that gives the false appearance of silver. If metal is referenced with the razor, it seems to have a potential (false yet resonant) relation to that of the metal spoon, which encrypts a secret relation to Algeria.

In the film, the hidden secret also refers to the spectacle of the Algerian war and the public secret of the massacre of 17 October 1961. Algerians were thrown into the Seine as they protested peacefully against a night-time curfew imposed by the French government in response to the violent struggle for independence in Algeria. (The war ultimately resulted in independence and the death of between 100,000 and 150,000 French and 800,000 and 1,500,000 Algerians.) In *caché*, we are informed that this was the site of Majid's parents' murder, in which, one could say, following Dupin, that all the French are implicated, if not directly responsible. It is also a secret (the *caché*) that has been established as spectacular in current thinking about film and the 'trauma' associated with the war. Initially, the fear of technology revealing the essence of French violence in relation to Algerians resulted in the banning of films such as Jacques Panijel's *Octobre à Paris* (1961), which was seized by the French authorities on its first screening. Some newspaper journalists, along with Panijel and Jean-Paul Sartre, organized protests concerning the coverup. The authorities had such powers as a result of emergency laws from 1955 that allowed authorities to censor, restrict movement and impose curfews. In 2005, following the suburban riots in France, these emergency laws were invoked once again. Although ultimately unsuccessful, there was also an attempt to censor the negative side of French colonialism.<sup>11</sup>

Numerous films have now been made revealing the extensive coverup by the police of both the massacre and the violent policies of Maurice Papon, who was in charge of the French police at the time, and had been an official in the Vichy regime. (His long career in politics came to an end in 1998 when he was convicted for 'crimes against humanity' committed during his Vichy years. Amnesty laws concerning the Algerian war would protect him from any conviction relating to his propagation of and participation in violence at that time.) Films documenting the massacre include Philip Brooks and Alan Hayling's documentary *Drowning By Bullets* (1992) and Alain Tasma's docudrama *Nuit noire, 17 octobre 1961* (2005). Once, film technology that could assist in revealing the hidden truth was banned. However, technology itself has the effect of

<sup>11</sup> See *LOI no. 2005-158 du 23 février 2005 portant reconnaissance de la Nation et contribution nationale en faveur des Français rapatriés*. The law demanded that schoolteachers present a positive view of French colonialism. The law was extremely controversial and was ultimately repealed by Chirac.



12 See Martin Heidegger, 'The question concerning technology', in David Farrell Krell (ed.), *Basic Writings* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 319–40.

drawing attention not only to the bareness of humanity, but also to the inhuman contained within it. On the other side of nature, and as a departure from the human's animal trace, technology, as Heidegger reminds us, can also begin to enframe, in an inhuman manner, life as spectacle.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the affect associated with the trauma of the Algerian war has currently dominated what has become a kind of surplus enjoyment of that foundational trauma, played out as spectacle and often resulting in extraordinary projections of resentment, shame and guilt – just as in *Caché*.

If analytical skills are theorized in Poe's first frame narrative along with a lesson in reading, books also play an important part in Haneke's film, even if the reading of them seems less important than their appearance and circulation. Although Dupin gives us a lesson in reading, Georges is the anchor of a television literary talk show, and the backdrop for that show is a simulacrum of books on shelves, which in turn echoes visually the living room of Georges and Anne within which there are books, a large television screen and videotapes. Anne is an editor in a publishing house and has recently published a book on globalization. At the book launch, discussions can be overheard about the literary scene and indeed theorists of simulacra, including Jean Baudrillard. Life and its simulacrum frequently collapse into each other and the book as technology of knowing is represented as its own trace. When Georges asks about a screenplay a friend is writing, the question is misunderstood with a shadow of guilt – 'what's it about, this scenario?' is interpreted (or rather projected) as an accusation. What is this performance? Who are those with a guilty conscience (in this instance Pierre and Anne)? What is being played out? Later, Anne thinks Pierrot is accusing her of having an affair with Pierre.

The function of the frame narrative that we saw in Poe's story is transformed and becomes non-narrative in Haneke's film. There is no lesson or anything in particular to be discovered in the disturbingly long establishing shots. They seem to suggest that we should look for something, or investigate in the manner in which we have been taught to read. And yet in *Caché*, there is only emptiness and spectacle. Even the name of the road gives us no real clue, but returns us to spectacle once more: the Rue des Iris refers us back simply to the mechanism of the eyeballs. Looking at looking, the camera on the Rue des Iris scans the technology of looking itself. The different technologies of analysis and knowing reflect a different moment in the technology of Being and dwelling, as Heidegger describes it: the world in which one understands 'I am' as 'I dwell' is set off-balance within the era of global movement.<sup>13</sup>

There are numerous frames to *Caché* as there are to Poe's story, suggesting a kernel at its heart. The kernel is presented as the guilt and subsequent anxiety experienced by Georges as a result of a lie he told to his parents as a young boy concerning Majid vomiting blood and threatening him with an axe. The lie had huge consequences for Majid. Georges's parents had planned to adopt him and give him a good education, but the lie meant Majid was sent to an orphanage and grew up

13 See Heidegger, 'Building, dwelling, thinking', in *Basic Writings*, pp. 319–39.

with few opportunities. Georges experiences this memory through dreams initially, and one could say that these dreams reveal yet another layer beneath them, that of a threat against Georges's boyhood.

Georges's adult anxiety is revealed in a dream about a boyhood castration anxiety involving Majid. The affect associated with the anxiety in the dream is realized with the headless chicken, as if anxiety, castration and the inhuman all set the human aside and render it unable to dwell in himself. Georges, in a pathetic projection, dreams of himself as suffering the same fate as the chicken. In fact, the childhood guilt gives the appearance in the film of the kernel, and yet the subsequent frames of the film shed some doubt on this diegetic psychologizing. The plot takes Georges's anxiety as the essence of his, and indeed the diegesis's, Being, which is once again set aside from itself through the technology of dreaming, seeing and filming. No comfortable dwelling seems possible as the 'inhuman' technology sets 'I am' against itself.

The title asks us to investigate that which is hidden, as if we are given a layered narrative or scenario with a latent content to be deciphered, which is the ultimate secret behind the narrative and the affect associated with it. After looking for something in the establishing shot, there is also the attempt to find something hidden in Anne, whose face is concealed from us in the first few minutes of her presence onscreen as if the camera itself is so self-absorbed that it cannot look at another. Similarly, we look to the transition shots for meaning – the passages in the swimming pool that punctuate the film introduce anxiety. Like Dupin's witnesses who see threat as the foreign everywhere, we look for meaning in voices, for example, in the acousmatic manifestation of the swimming instructor's voice that becomes menacing for no reason as we wonder whether it, or some other inhuman source, may in fact be the source of the surveillance itself. Unlike in Dupin's world, Asiatics and Africans do abound. The technology of filmmaking itself – the inhuman technology of spectacle making – asks us to investigate through surfaces something which ultimately has no depth, but is rather propelled on the level of the signifier to guard against the knowledge of the source of the secret. Perhaps, Majid has no interest in Georges at all and is entirely without the ability to either castrate or accuse, and perhaps all life is enframed. That may be what the ultimate secret really is.

Georges's anxiety functions to constitute a claustrophobic diegetic world in which anxiety dominates and comes to shape and give arbitrary meaning to everything that occurs. The French experience of Algeria and its war as hidden spectacle and spectacularized guilt – the stuff of dinner-party conversations – is self-absorbed surplus enjoyment. This renders the Algerians once again as a menacing cause of this anxiety. Algerians in the film can only deny their part in a narrative that has already given them roles that justify accusation and criminalization. There is nothing to indicate their guilt in the film other than Georges's own projections. Rather, there is some reference to the fact that the spectacle of violence that structures French fear and summons the spectacular violence of the

Algerian war absolves the French of guilt once again. Here, the presence of postmodern surfaces and the thematization of surveillance, this time attributed to Algerians in spite of the surveillance mechanisms used against Algerians by the French, unfolds a narrative of revenge in which a camera gaze is returned in an oppositional structure. This has been documented widely, but appears in films such as *The Battle of Algiers* (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966), in which part of the film is repeated from another angle by surveillance cameras. In fact, Georges is the only figure who can manipulate or cut and splice images. His dreams, his video-lined lounge, his career which is both to host and to edit programmes and the world in which he lives, show him to possess the power of cutting (whether film, a throat, or a spectacle) more than anyone else in the film. (Anne, too, is an editor/publisher of books, but not of film or of any other visual media.) The surveillance camera that documents Georges's dwelling and then his movements, and the images and postcards that arrive from nowhere, seem to show the inhuman – technologized, affective and indeed the animal side of Georges – as their source, and also the source of the 'crime' of surveillance itself. The camera is never decoded.

So *Caché* is ultimately a film about anxiety in relation to a history of colonial violence and the technology associated with it. Paradoxically given the different regime of seeing and technology of knowing that abounds in Poe's story, *Murders at the Rue Morgue* gives us a clue to the source of the 'crime' which becomes, as in Poe, the inhuman in multiple frames of understanding. Both story and film document the fear of intrusion into dwelling. If the narrative frame in the story suggested depth and reflection on reading, the frames of the film suggest surface tension and force-fields in which the accused Algerian is fundamental and yet entirely irrelevant to the production of anxiety and the image. The image becomes saturated with spectacle, rendering the Algerians relevant only in their relation to Georges's bourgeois late capitalist anxiety, an affect bound by its lack of content and pathic projection in which that which disturbs one's dwelling, whether foreigner, affect, technology or animal, becomes the inhuman.

The trace of Algeria in this world of late capitalist globalization is figured as a projection once again, as if there was not a larger story in which all French are implicated, even if ultimately innocent of the specific crime. Georges's boyhood lie, after all, is a simple and rather typical lie of a child – not criminal in itself – but nonetheless has huge consequences. But as a film about anxiety, Georges's boyhood lie is stressed as an innocent mistake around which a huge anxiety and guilt has been built as if to shore up, with indignation, an aggressive being and the right to a comfortable dwelling. And the larger implication of France's relation to Algeria and its continued violence against Franco-Algerians is left unaddressed, as Majid's and his son's own roles are entirely defined once again by the strength of the inhuman anxiety of Georges and the French spectators. Georges can make the final cut and

write Majid's suicide into the script as if it were Majid's refusal of Georges and a threat to him once again. Georges as editor is naively identified with the position of the other, but Georges as self-selected victim is always in fear of Majid's putative power to castrate. Majid lives on in Georges's world as the undead, or the inhuman, even if he has actually been sacrificed as the all-too-human victim to Georges's unstoppable anxiety and colonial guilt.

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## The empire looks back

MAX SILVERMAN

<sup>1</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1966).

Frantz Fanon's classic anticolonial text *The Wretched of the Earth*<sup>1</sup> ends with a number of case studies of Algerian patients with mental disorders. Fanon presents the views of French psychiatrists who attribute these disorders to the congenital behaviour of Algerians. He subsequently exposes this 'science' as a European mystification of the truth: the real cause of these neuroses, he tells us, is the historically specific situation of colonialism. Fanon's technique, here and elsewhere in his anticolonial writings, is to train the eye on the colonizer in the process of looking at the colonized in order to expose the psychosexual fears and fantasies on which that gaze is premised and their alienating effects on colonizer and colonized.

Michael Haneke's film *Caché/Hidden* operates, loosely, in a way similar to Fanon in that it reverses the gaze of the western colonizer and exposes the hidden fears and fantasies still at play today in a postcolonial re-run of the colonial encounter. As the protagonist, Georges, is forced to confront that forgotten moment in his childhood when he betrayed the young Algerian boy, Majid, a set of assumptions about the behaviour of Algerians similar to those of the French psychiatrists described by Fanon rises to the surface. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon says the following of the western imago of the Algerian: 'Every colony tends to turn into a huge farmyard, where the only law is that of the knife'<sup>2</sup>; 'The Algerian kills savagely... The Algerian, you are told, needs to feel warm blood, and to bathe in the blood of his victim... A certain number of magistrates go so far as to say that the reason why an Algerian kills a man is primarily and above all in order to slit his throat'<sup>3</sup>; 'the Algerian is a congenital impulsive'<sup>4</sup>; the Algerian is 'a prey to melancholia' and conforms to the type that could potentially commit suicide (except the Algerian takes his violence out on others rather than himself)<sup>5</sup>; in 'a

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 240–1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 242.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

6 Ibid., p. 41.

7 For the most detailed analysis of this event to date, see Jim House and Neil MacMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

8 Julia Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988).

world divided into compartments' in which 'the native is a being hemmed in . . . his dreams are of action and of aggression. I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, climbing.'<sup>6</sup> Uncannily, the imago of the Algerian which returns to haunt Georges's mind is composed of the same elements.

The impression created by this image echoing across the decades is that liberal bourgeois life today is but a thin veneer covering archaic stereotypes transmitted unthinkingly from generation to generation. Indeed, there is clear evidence in the film that Georges's unconscious is inhabited by a common set of beliefs about Algerians. As a child of six in 1961, at the height of the Algerian war of independence, Georges seems to know instinctively that the best lie that he can tell his parents to persuade them to send Majid away rather than adopt him is that Majid has been spitting blood and that he cut off the head of the cockerel with an axe in the farmyard, covering himself in the bird's blood in the process, in order to scare him (Georges). In the first of Georges's dreams in which this episode is relived, Majid is seen approaching the young Georges with axe raised about to wreak his bloody revenge. Why this particular story about the Algerian, if not because there is a common fear, passed down from nation to individual and parent to child, that Algerians, in Fanon's words, kill savagely, live by the knife and need to feel warm blood? Georges will interpret Majid's suicide (the culmination of slit throats and spurting blood depicted in the child-like drawings) as Majid's revenge for the treatment he received forty years before rather than the mirror-image of his own (and his nation's) racialized projection. What returns to haunt Georges are his, and his country's, stereotyped fears and fantasies of the Algerian buried deep within the French national psyche whose most profoundly repressed moment is 17 October 1961, when these fears spilled over into naked aggression by the French forces of law and order on the streets of Paris, resulting in the slaughter of at least 120 peacefully demonstrating Algerians. In terms of the film's narrative, it is implied that Majid's parents were two of the victims of this massacre.<sup>7</sup>

However, if these fears and fantasies resemble those of the European settlers in Algeria at the time of the war of independence (1954–62), Haneke's deorientalizing treatment of the return of this particular repressed highlights significant differences too. The same image returns in a very different context. Since the end of the Algerian war, the world has moved on. Liberal bourgeois France has renounced its colonial aspirations and retreated behind high walls to adopt a defensive position. The most effective way now to keep that troubling world at bay and to preserve a secure identity is no longer to civilize the bloodthirsty savages in the colonial 'farmyard' and reduce the other to the same, but rather to keep the other out altogether (and, to adopt Julia Kristeva's terms, to keep worrying otherness out of the self).<sup>8</sup> As a visual sign of the new gated community constructed to keep difference at bay, Georges's and Anne's house is raised off the ground, barred by a high gate and obscured by a large bush at ground level, with only a side door as exit and entrance.

Intrusions into this zone of security are either met with anger (Georges's reaction to the black male cyclist who almost knocks him down as he crosses the road), liberal diplomacy (Anne's reaction to the same incident) or the exoticization of difference (the token black female friend at the dinner party), all different ways of neutralizing the other.

In the postmodern climate of contemporary France, the device *par excellence* for screening out the real is the image. Hence, Georges, as a television presenter at work and the proud owner of a huge television monitor at home, projects images onto the world and receives them as part of his domestic decor without ever being troubled by either. His home is a vast array of book covers, which also forms the backdrop to his television literary chat show. Like well-chosen wallpaper, this projects an image of intellectual depth. Georges is shown editing his programme, splicing up the real to make it more accessible to his bourgeois audience. After witnessing Majid's suicide, he instinctively disappears into the darkened space of the cinema, presumably to allow the flickering images to efface harsh realities. Just like the lies he constantly tells Anne, his life is an illusion of secure identity.

*Caché* deals more with techniques of repression today than with the idea of an unconscious atavistic national reflex about Algerians. It demonstrates how the new defensive identities of contemporary bourgeois France, which efface troubling differences and questions of responsibility, are particularly dependent on the image which smoothes out reality's jagged edges. In the anticolonial moment of the postwar period, Fanon's solution to destroying the European power zone was violent insurrection. In the postcolonial moment of the new millennium, it is more a question of disturbing the comfort zone of bourgeois everyday life. Haneke appears to suggest, paradoxically, that if the image is central to preserving this comfort zone, it is also central to piercing the new defences. Haneke plays on the ambiguous nature of the image and the gaze: on the one hand, they domesticate, normalize, exoticize and objectify the world for easy consumption; on the other hand, they have the power to unsettle this new form of voyeurism. Techniques of surveillance were formerly instruments of power used to control and oppress others, especially in the hands of the French army at the time of the Algerian war. Their generalization today might be an essential element in defending the gated community against the other; but they can also be used to put under surveillance the very people who formerly controlled the cameras. Today we are all objects of someone else's gaze and, because of the endless circulation of images, often incapable of fixing its source. No matter how many times Georges and Anne fast-forward or rewind the tapes, no matter how thorough their investigation into the motive for sending the tapes or the identity of the perpetrator, their privacy has been invaded by unknown forces. Similarly, the ubiquity of the image today inevitably allows traumatic moments across the globe to penetrate the privacy of the home, as killings in the Middle East are visible on the television screen in Georges's and Anne's sitting



room while the domestic drama of the disappearance of their son Pierrot is played out. The image may be a fundamental part of the apparatus of repression, but it is also the key which can unlock the gate of the bourgeois comfort zone by straddling the illusory line between public and private space.

Haneke's technique to breach the world of simulacra is to establish multiple ripples in the smooth surface of the image. Hence, the film slips constantly between video and the 'real', between dream and the 'real', between the 'real' and its defamiliarization as the film we are watching as spectators and between different points of view across all these levels. These slippages challenge Georges's and Anne's purchase on reality and truth, and our own. They fragment a safe world (especially the safe world of the cinema as spectacle) and, in the process, open up a violent and disordered space beyond our control. The three moments in the film when Georges retires to his bed in order to banish anxiety all exemplify this. In the first, when Georges visits his mother in the family home, the safety of that environment is disturbed by his nightmare which contains the gruesome image of the young Majid decapitating the cockerel and then advancing on him watching from the shadows; in the second, when Georges returns home after Majid's suicide and withdraws into the darkened space of his bedroom, the hermetically sealed zone of security signified by his voyeuristic peep at the street outside through the drawn curtains (seeing but not seen) is subverted by the receding camera in the room which catches him in the act of looking; thirdly, when he returns home early from work after his aggressive confrontation with Majid's son and retires once again to his darkened bedroom to curl up naked under the covers in foetal position, the camera trained on him (like the hidden camera(s) trained on him throughout) once again denies the impermeability of that space, breaks the voyeur's illusion of power and, as Catherine Wheatley observes, introduces questions of self-awareness and responsibility.<sup>9</sup> Haneke seems to suggest that the way to penetrate the closed world of the contemporary 'wallpaper' generation, who can no longer distinguish between the image and the world, is to puncture the security of the image itself. The image as anaesthetic then transforms into the image as challenge to 'homeland security'.

Haneke is dealing, therefore, not only with the European's orientalist gaze dissected by Fanon but also with the techniques by which that gaze is both perpetuated and challenged forty years after the bitter war of Algerian independence. *Caché* is a commentary on a France (at least in the form of Georges) so incapable of dealing with difference unless it is kept strictly at arms-length, and so anaesthetized against its own guilt and responsibility in relation to past events, that only a dismantling of the erected barricades will open up hidden truths.

However, Haneke's contemporary parable of Franco-Algerian relations may suggest, too, that Georges and Anne are not to be read as an allegory of France but only of a certain generation and class of French men and women. Georges's mother, as the proprietor of a large *domaine*

9 Catherine Wheatley, 'Secrets, lies and videotape', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2006), pp. 32–6.

somewhere in the heart of what is known as *la France profonde*, has completely erased the ‘bad memory’ of that ‘unpleasant’ time forty years ago. She does not even remember who Majid is. Georges, metropolitan bourgeois liberal, is at least troubled by the memory when it returns, even if his reaction to something so profoundly repressed is first aggression, then denial (*je ne suis pas responsable* he shouts defiantly at Majid’s son in a stark echo of the concentration camp guards in Alain Resnais’s Holocaust film *Night and Fog* [1955]) and finally a metaphorical return to the womb. But Pierrot does not seem to share the same reflexes as his parents or grandmother. The drawings trigger no memories and have no associations for him; he appears uncomprehending as to why his father has sent him one of the drawings at school (unless, of course, he is not telling the truth). He seems suffocated by the embrace of his parents (he pushes his mother away when she tries to hold him) and indifferent to their ‘gated’ bourgeois values, hence his passion for swimming (which, remembering Fanon’s words again, is the response of a ‘being hemmed in’), his disappearance from the family home and, in the last image, his conversation with Majid’s son outside the school. The same generation gap seems to characterize the respective responses of Majid and his son. Majid’s reaction to a France which continues to treat him like a dangerous terrorist, issues threats and locks him up is to commit suicide. His son, however, is vigorous and unfazed by Georges’s aggression. Majid’s son and Pierrot appear to see the world not through the orientalist iconography of their parents’ generation but in a more open way. Although we do not know what the conversation between the two young men is about in the final scene, one possible interpretation is that the colonial barriers and atavistic reflexes of previous generations may be loosening through dialogue and a new attitude to difference. Could it be that the multidimensional role of the image today signifies the demise of the controlling gaze by which the West has maintained its mastery over others?

Fanon’s response to what he defined as the ‘manicheism delirium’,<sup>10</sup> of self and other constructed by western colonialism was a reverse manicheism in which the other takes his bloody revenge. Paul Gilroy rightly points out that Fanon erects ‘a binary code almost as pernicious as the manichean dualism that he sought to supplant’.<sup>11</sup> *Caché* offers some hope that the ‘infernal circle’<sup>12</sup> of the colonial paradigm may be broken by the dialogue and shifting perspectives of a postcolonial paradigm.

10 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986), p. 183.

11 Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 248.

12 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 116.

## Cinema at the Periphery Conference, University of St Andrews, Scotland, 15–17 June 2006

LARS KRISTENSEN

It was the ambition of the newly established Centre for Film Studies at the University of St Andrews to give its inaugural conference – Cinema at the Periphery – maximum impact by inviting major international film scholars to this north-eastern corner of the British Isles and to the oldest University in Scotland. The three-day conference was organized by the staff of the Department of Film Studies and supported by the British Academy. Through the topic of peripheral filmmaking, the organizers sought to move forward the debate on ‘minor cinema’, ‘accented cinema’ and ‘transnational cinema’, which has occupied film studies for nearly a decade.

The papers certainly succeeded in advancing this trend and, notwithstanding the predominance of film academics from European and US universities, the scope of the papers reflected the fact that ‘peripheral cinema’ is a global phenomenon. The speakers had three quarters of an hour to make the case for their cinema at the periphery. Although presentations lasting nearly an hour are not always an aid to clarity (or to the audience), the conference did achieve its objective of ‘creating a forum for discussion about the interface between culture, ideology and artistry in the margins’.

We were scarcely into the final discussion of the second panel when there was a call for a clearer definition of periphery. The panel had covered the cinemas of New Zealand, China and Japan, hence there was an aptness to the question. All three speakers responded in different ways. Duncan Petrie (University of Auckland) replied that in the case of

New Zealand cinema, there is a fear of the periphery, a fear of being peripheral. This emotion is not felt in the cinemas of the Celtic fringe, a comparison which also served Petrie in his presentation on the diversity of cinema production in New Zealand. Sheldon Lu (University of California, Davis), whose paper concerned the forced marginalization of independent Chinese filmmakers, replied by stating that in a global world, all countries fight marginalization. This is the case even for Chinese cinema, which, as Lu pointed out in his talk, can hardly be considered 'minor'. In Lúcia Nagib's (University of Leeds) opinion, the question of the periphery should not be understood in terms of the old binary 'the West and the rest', but rather as a polycentric approach, in which cinematic influence derives from many diverse centres. As Nagib illustrated in her paper, both Brecht and traditional Japanese erotic painting have influenced filmmakers like Nagisa Oshima, but she also noted that Japanese cinema has in turn influenced filmmaking in Brazil from the time of Ozu. Although still not reaching near a clear definition of the periphery, these three responses underlined the conference's range and diversity.

Preceding this discussion, we heard two differing views on the healthiness of peripheral cinema, both the optimistic and the pessimistic. Mette Hjort's (Lingnan University) paper explored the 'Advance Party' initiative, a transnational and, according to Hjort, homophobic partnership between Sigma Films (Scotland) and Zentropa (Denmark). This partnership has the aim of nurturing new talent by offering small-scale production with Dogma-like constraints. While this constituted the more optimistic view of how two peripheries may join forces in order to succeed in the global cinema market, then Rod Stoneman (Huston School of Film and Digital Media) showed the other side of the coin. Stoneman argued that world cinema was currently virtually unavailable on television and cinema screens, and found the situation only a little better on the internet, where some diversity – Stoneman's cornerstone for the creation of tolerance – can be found. This begs another question, which the conference also covered: the question of distribution. How does the cinema of the periphery gain exposure? There was a general dissatisfaction voiced at the inability of film festivals to generate sufficient interest in marginal films that could lead to their greater exposure. This issue was key to Faye Ginsburg's (New York University) presentation on the rise of Australian Aboriginal filmmaking. One of Ginsburg's examples was Rachel Perkins, whose career has developed to the point where she is now making feature films. But while these have achieved success at a national level and at film festivals, they have failed to gain distribution outside the festival circuit.

Two papers made the effort of mapping out the periphery. Dudley Andrew (Yale University) time-mapped cinema waves from early modernism to postmodern global cinema, and Kristian Feigelson (Sorbonne Nouvelle) attempted to draw a geopolitical map of the film world. Both papers, in my opinion, fared less well in encapsulating the

diversity of the infinite peripheries than the presentations which concentrated on one particular area. That we were dealing with an infinite numbers of peripheries was highlighted with additional papers on English-speaking filmmaking. Pam Cook (University of Southampton) examined Baz Luhrmann and his career from national filmmaker to his collaborations on big-budget Hollywood productions. Although this may appear a familiar trajectory, Cook presented the Luhrmann mode of blockbuster production as situated within both the national and the global. The global hegemony, according to Cook, is in Luhrmann's case both recognized and negotiated, but not subverted. Contrary to Mette Hjort's homophilic Scottish–Danish collaboration, John Caughie (University of Glasgow) constructed Lynne Ramsay's *Morvern Callar* (2001) within the Scottish–English axis and a linear tradition of British art cinema. Caughie contested the notion of Scottish national cinema as post devolution, arguing that Scottish cinema is still in a stage of 'as if ...' and experimentalism, emphasizing subjectivity rather than (national) identity.

André Téchiné's *Loin* (2001), which is set in Tangiers, appeared in two presentations. Tangiers was the setting for Patricia Pister's (University of Amsterdam) paper, which examined this city in film and how it has represented both the colonial gateway to Africa and the postcolonial migrant gateway to Europe. For Bill Marshall, however, Tangiers and *Loin* were compared and contrasted to the periphery of Québec cinema. Marshall used Deleuze's and Guattari's notion of the Québécois as a 'people to come', which again echoed Caughie's notion of a Scottish cinema. Both cinemas struggle with the major colonial language.

Yet another theme the conference addressed was the issue of language creating borders and barriers. In particular, this issue came to the fore with Laura U. Marks's (Simon Fraser University) paper. Marks focused on the impossibility for the Arab filmmaker of making images without deconstructing and negating the Arab world. The result is that at times the final image is barely an image at all, and Marks used an example from *Civil War* (2002) by Mohammed Soueid, whose enduring presence at the conference was much appreciated. In *Civil War*, Soueid's camera lingers on a female dentist recounting the dental records of Lebanon, which only through the filmmaker, who is out of frame, becomes an image of the Lebanese Civil War. According to Marks, these personal experiences of Arab filmmakers pass through a grid of translation and contextualization in the search for funding and distribution outside the Arab world. If, near the end of the conference, we were suffused with cinematic peripheries, then Hamid Naficy (Rice University), who presented a part of his forthcoming book on early Iranian cinema, reminded us that cinema in its infancy contained peripheral collaboration. Naficy demonstrated how the formation of a national Iranian cinema consisted of the involvement of Russians and Armenians, working within the national context of Iran.

The concluding remarks revealed, in addition to the familiar end-of-conference fatigue, further useful areas for investigation. Dudley Andrew brought to the fore the question of the city and of what occurs with the city when it becomes peripheral. Bill Marshall echoed this with the notion of suburbs and the French *banlieue* space in cinema. In Naficy's concluding remarks, he emphasized that the periphery is located in the interstitial mode of filmmaking, which shifts back and forth between the periphery and centre. He proposed that we should look to the regionality between the dichotomy of centre–periphery. Andrews agreed with this, adding that drama happens there and always has.

As the concluding remarks show, the pinpointing of new and endless peripheries creates new centres where issues of 'the core' resurface. The possibility of overthrowing a powerful, hierarchical dominion lies not in the movement beyond the core, but in the interstice of the rim and its centre(s). To the suggestion of continuing the investigation into this interstitial region, Andrew replied 'I am happy to do that'. This promise of more research into cinema at the periphery, rather than closure, echoes the sentiments that ended the conference and gives hope to the continued focus on margins in cinema. A publication of the conference papers is intended – let's hope it is a firm navigation of the boundless peripheries that the conference located.

**Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar, *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006, 313 pp.**

**Gina Marchetti, *From Tian'anmen to Times Square: Transnational China and the Chinese Diaspora on Global Screens 1989–1997*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006, 302 pp.**

#### STEPHEN TEO

China's rise on the world stage as a political and economic power in the new millennium was more or less signaled by its rise as a cinematic power when Chen Kaige's *The Yellow Earth* first made a dramatic impact on global screens in 1984. The film heralded the dawn of a new cinema in the mainland spearheaded by the so-called Fifth Generation directors, including Kaige, Zhang Yimou and Tian Zhuangzhuang. Since then, the Sixth Generation directors including Jia Zhangke, Zhang Yuan, Wang Xiaoshuai and Lou Ye have consolidated and expanded on China's cinematic reputation around the world. The rise of Chinese cinema was in fact preceded by the 'new wave' movements in Hong Kong (in 1979) and in Taiwan (around 1982) which underlined the political complexity of 'three Chinas' with separate film industries, all asserting claims of being the Chinese national cinema. *China on Screen* and *From Tian'anmen to Times Square* cover all three Chinese cinemas, probing into the complexity and appropriateness of the national and the transnational contours of Chinese-language films.

From the outset, the respective authors – Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar, and Gina Marchetti – assert that Chinese cinema had always pursued a transnational strategy of development, therefore putting into relief the vexed issue of 'national cinema'. At the same time, Chinese films reflect not merely the nation or the contested claims of nation between China and Taiwan, but also the Chinese diaspora. Both books contain major sections on Singaporean films as exemplifying the



- 1 Hong Kong's production of Mandarin films after World War II right up to the 1970s constitutes a de facto national cinema, particularly when these films were recognized by the Kuomintang regime in Taiwan as *guopian* (national films).
- 2 For an astute discussion on the complexities of the three Chinese cinemas and their relation to the issue of national cinema, see Yingjin Zhang, 'Introduction: national cinema and China', in *Chinese National Cinema* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 1–12.
- 3 See Chris Berry, 'From national cinema to cinema and the national', in Paul Willemsen and Valentina Vitali (eds), *Theorising National Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 2006), p. 149.
- 4 See Tu Wei-ming, 'Cultural China: the periphery as the center', *Daedalus*, vol. 120, no. 2 (1991), p. 2.

'transnational cinematic mode' of Chinese films (or films made by ethnic Chinese). Both books begin, in separate but surprisingly convergent ways, by questioning the central conceit of the national, as the introduction to *China on Screen* makes clear. The book 'examines some of the many and complex ways the national shapes and appears in Chinese films' (p. 2), arguing that the concept of 'the national' is central to the three Chinese cinemas of China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, even as it puts the concept into the ring of controversy. In all three territories, the cinema functions as 'one of the primary vehicles for promoting national history and the nation state' (p. 30), but in the case of Hong Kong, it was 'never a nation-state' (p. 38)<sup>1</sup> – a point also made by Marchetti in her book (p. 46) – and in the cases of China and Taiwan, the nation-state is highly contested and made more complicated in recent years by Taiwan's quite transparent desire for independence.<sup>2</sup>

Chris Berry has elsewhere argued that the 'national' in the Chinese national cinema is a fraught concept, proposing a framework where 'the national is no longer confined to the form of the territorial nation-state but multiple, proliferating, contested and overlapping'.<sup>3</sup> In *China on Screen*, he and his cowriter Mary Farquhar have carefully and comprehensively regarded the three Chinese cinemas, as well as the Singaporean cinema, to underscore the multiple, proliferating, contested and overlapping nature of Chinese-language films. However, by positing the idea of the national, it seems to me to re-accentuate the problem of the Chinese cinema from the perspective of the Chinese nation-state and how much it is contingent on the stability of the nation, as the contesting nature of three film industries making Chinese films reflects, in the first instance, the still unresolved civil war between the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang. It was this civil war that put into flux the idea of a single national cinema that could unite all Chinese.

The complex nature of the national underlines the psychopolitical issue of defining a nation-state such as China in a postcolonial environment. Confucian scholar Tu Wei-ming's claim that China's semicolonial experience in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had 'severely damaged her spiritual life and her ability to tap indigenous symbolic resources' may strike a relevant chord here.<sup>4</sup> The growth of a Chinese film industry in Shanghai during the 1920s took place in a cosmopolitan city divided into the Chinese City, the French Concession and the International Concession – the last two where foreign powers held sway with extraterritorial rights. At the same time, both Taiwan and Hong Kong were, respectively, colonies of Japan and Britain, and the experiences of colonization and foreign rule (despite Hong Kong's reunification with China) continue to undergird the controversial nature of the national in relation to Chinese cinema. Where the structure of the national has been eroded by civil war and colonialism, what remains is the cultural imaginary of the nation and its history. As Ernest Gellner suggested, culture becomes essential to a person's identity if he or she is not held in place by a structure of stable relationships implicit in the

5 See Ernest Gellner, 'Nationalism', in *Thought and Change* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), pp. 157–8.

concept of the nation.<sup>5</sup> Although all the three competing cinematic entities of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan can legitimately be seen as representing Chinese national cinema in one way or another, Berry and Farquhar go on to examine what holds them together – the cultural underpinnings of 'cultural China': an abstract, mythical centre, designed essentially to fulfil the cultural needs of the Chinese Diaspora (or what Tu has called 'the periphery' in his essay 'Cultural China'). The chapter 'Operatic modes' is representative of this cultural analysis and is exemplary in its focus on varied forms and genres of films that utilize the operatic mode, not least the opera film. The chapter also analyzes martial arts films as an integral part of this operatic mode, in particular, the films directed by King Hu (*A Touch of Zen* [1970–71]) and Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), inspired largely by *A Touch of Zen*. Such films serve as the representative form of the cultural, as well as historical, imaginary of China. However, the authors of *China on Screen* never lose sight of their ultimate purpose of illuminating readers as to the often unpredictable and hazardous subjects of ethnicity, gender and the elusiveness (indeed, the illusion) of national cohesiveness and unity in their quest to position and appreciate Chinese cinema from within the cloisters of nation and without (the transnational configuration of Chinese films). In the process, they have somehow ensured that Chinese films can only be regarded fruitfully through a prism of postmodern hybridity and comprehensiveness.

In *From Tian'anmen to Times Square*, Gina Marchetti provides the same wide-ranging scope of Chinese cinema, from the national to the transnational, as her title suggests. Marchetti has carefully chosen her case studies of films to illustrate the diversity and variety of Chinese-language films, from fiction to documentary, from arthouse to mainstream, from historical epics to martial arts pictures. She supports her choices with typically rigorous analyses and thorough research. There is an enlightening chapter on Hong Kong's condition of postmodern identity, which has come about from its colonial attachment to Britain and its relationship to China, in which Marchetti does an astute turn in analyzing Wong Kar-wai's *Chungking Express* (1994) as a postmodern allegory of Hong Kong's return to China on 1 July 1997. She discusses the film's broaching of the question of Hong Kong's mixed identity based on a dialectical opposition between East and West.

The book on the whole moves adeptly to ground its premiss of a transnational Chinese cinema by focusing on films – those of the Singaporean Eric Khoo and the Canadian Paul Lee, for example – which foreshorten the perspective of transnationalism and the Chinese diaspora. Marchetti thus makes the perspective a much more intimate one for readers who may not know what the Chinese Diaspora and 'transnational China' entails and how deep it goes. Khoo makes Singaporean films in which the characters speak Chinese of various dialects but also 'Singlish' (Singaporean English), reflecting the city-state's own colonial legacy and its postcolonial, postmodern present, whereas Lee explores gay and

lesbian issues among the Chinese community in Canada. The book also helpfully includes interviews with these and other filmmakers (Allen Fong, Edward Yang, Evans Chan and Carma Hinton) between the chapters: a structuring device that has the effect of reminding readers that films and their meanings after all cannot exist without human intervention.

Marchetti's achievement lies not only in her astute analyses of films, but also in her grasping of the different issues and circumstances which inform her selected films. The chapter on gangland Taiwan as portrayed in Edward Yang's *Mahjong* and Hou Hsiao-hsien's *Goodbye South Goodbye*, both released in 1996, testifies to the author's mastery of understanding Taiwan's peculiar context and her local culture, marked by a postmodern thrust of 'transnational imagination'. Both films are underappreciated works, which, under Marchetti's expert investigation, reveal a depth and substance that would otherwise have been ignored, even by admirers of the two directors who made them (indeed, the films are often regarded as these directors' lesser works).

In fact, to her credit, Marchetti tends to focus on minor or little known works or directors throughout her book: a film such as *Rapid Fire* (Dwight H. Little, 1992), a kung fu vehicle featuring the late Brandon Lee (son of Bruce); the works of the Hong Kong filmmaker Evans Chan, a resident of New York; the 'migration trilogy' of director Clara Law, who now resides in Melbourne and the 1995 documentary *The Gate of Heavenly Peace*, directed by the American Carma Hinton. All these works are subjected to Marchetti's forensic scrutiny, only to accentuate the nexus of localism and globalism and the problematic theme of nation in the space 'intersected by local and global interests' (p. 221), which is how Marchetti describes the space represented by Tian'anmen Square, as portrayed in *The Gate of Heavenly Peace*. Hinton's film (codirected with Richard Gordon) focuses on the survivors and protagonists of the Tian'anmen demonstrations that resulted in the 4 June Incident in 1989, still a taboo topic in China today. Tian'anmen Square may be described as a geospatial entity right smack in the middle of the capital Beijing, and Marchetti rightfully points out that it conveys 'very different and contradictory meanings at the local, national, international, and transnational levels' (p. 221). The tragedy of Tian'anmen Square on 4 June 1989 is that by sending in the troops to repel the demonstrators, the Chinese government attempted to foreclose the square as a geospatial domain.

The book closes with a discussion on Hinton's documentary, as if to underline the tragedy, and points out that the film has expanded into cyberspace with a website that somehow demonstrates the persisting contradiction of modern China as a repressive, authoritarian state and its rise as a capitalistic, business-oriented economic power in the new millennium – one that is open to the 'transnational flow of the global economy' (p. 232). As Marchetti ironically informs us, Tian'anmen Square has become a symbolic marketplace, whereas Times Square in

New York is occupied by Chinese political exiles. But as Chinese cinema continues to develop in between the spaces from Tian'anmen to Times Square, the contradictions will linger and grow and therein lie the seeds of hope. Tian'anmen Square and Times Square are heavily symbolic spaces, in a cross-cultural, even cross-political, kind of way suggesting what the future might be like – appropriately summed up by Marchetti's last provocative and profound line: 'If Tian'anmen can become a tourist destination, then Times Square can contain the seeds of an evolving political identity within transnational China' (p. 237).

Ian Conrich and David Woods (eds), *The Cinema of John Carpenter: the Technique of Terror*. London: Wallflower, 2004, 220 pp.  
 Kevin Heffernan, *Ghoul, Gimmicks, and Gold: Horror Films and the American Movie Business, 1953–1968*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004, 323 pp.  
 Matt Hills, *The Pleasures of Horror*. London: Continuum, 2005, 250 pp.  
 Peter Hutchings, *The Horror Film*. London: Longman, 2004, 244 pp.  
 Rick Worland, *The Horror Film: an Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007, 324 pp.

## MARK JANCOVICH

Academic study of the horror film has not only become a minor industry of academic publishing but has become virtually a genre in itself. Since 2000, a whole series of books have been produced that aim to introduce readers to that genre.<sup>1</sup> Most of this writing tends to fall into three distinct types: the first are histories that set out a narrative of the development of themes and styles within horror films; the second are attempts to define the genre theoretically and identify its fundamental characteristics; and the third are concentrated studies, which take one particular aspect of the genre and make that aspect the object of scrutiny.

The first two types predominate, largely because publishers see these as having greater potential as textbooks, but their very logic is often counter to key developments within genre theory. As a result, a lot of writing on horror still continues to discuss the genre in terms that pay little or no attention to contemporary developments in genre theory and replicate what have become canonical accounts of the genre's thematic or stylistic development or its formal or ideological identity.

Indeed, it is both surprising and depressing to see a genre, whose study is so often claimed to challenge existing hierarchies, being studied in terms of canons and consensus. Not only do most histories offer the same

<sup>1</sup> Ken Gelder, *The Horror Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000); Steve Chibnall, *British Horror Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2000); Paul Wells, *The Horror Film* (London: Wallflower, 2000); Mark Jancovich, *Horror, the Film Reader* (London: Routledge, 2001); Michelle Le Blanc and Colin Odell, *Horror Films* (London: Pocket Essentials, 2001); Kim Newman, *Science Fiction/Horror Reader* (London: British Film Institute, 2001); Reynold Humphries, *The American Horror Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002); Darryl Jones, *Horror: a Thematic History in Film and Fiction* (London: Hodder, 2002); Kendall Phillips, *Projected Fears: Horror Films and American Culture* (New York, NY: Praeger, 2005).

- 2 Steve Neale, 'Melo talk: on the meaning and use of the term "melodrama" in the American trade press', *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 32 (1993), pp. 66–89; James Naremore, *More than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998). See also Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2000) and Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999).

- 3 Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking and the Studio System* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1981).

periodizations and landmark films, with little variety until the end of the book when the author brings the story up to date, but the theoretical studies often continue to suggest that there *is* something called the horror film that exists as a stable and consistent body of work, in which history is a process similar to the development of a biological organism: the organism remains constant, even if individual organisms mature, age and eventually die.

However, as work in contemporary genre theory has shown, such approaches to genre are highly problematic. Both Steve Neale and James Naremore, for example, have demonstrated that the meanings of the terms 'melodrama' and 'film noir' have changed dramatically over their history,<sup>2</sup> and consequently, films that were seen as central to these terms in one period have been marginalized and even excluded in another. In other words, genres are not simply bodies of films to which new films are added, but are social processes of classification, whose meanings can alter radically. In the case of 'melodrama', for example, Neale argues that although the term was largely associated with male genres during the period of the classical Hollywood cinema, by the 1960s, it had come to signify the opposite and was associated with the woman's film.

It is therefore depressing how rarely recent books on horror have engaged with these developments in genre theory, and despite a large outpouring of books on the genre, most of these volumes have tended to follow familiar patterns with little sense of the new forms of historical research to which the study of a contemporary genre might point.

Many of these problems are exemplified in Rick Worland's *The Horror Film*. Although Worland has produced a number of fascinating historical studies of the horror film in article form, his book shows little engagement with contemporary genre theory. According to Worland, the book is meant to survey 'the history, stylistic development, and social reception of the American horror film from the earliest period of the genre's importance to the present' (p. 2). This raises a number of issues. First, history is largely seen as synonymous with 'stylistic development' so that 'the history' of horror is seen as little more than a narrative of development. Second, the material on social reception, which is by far the most interesting aspect of the book and the area in which Worland has already proved an important figure, is largely confined to just one of the book's thirteen chapters.

Furthermore, the work on the historic development is rather strange. Theoretically, the book seems to rely almost entirely on Thomas Schatz's book *Hollywood Genres*.<sup>3</sup> As a result, he not only accepts the model of generic development suggested by Schatz, which has been challenged by a number of critics since its original publication, but also ends up discussing genres as though they were stable and coherent entities. He therefore proposes to study the genre in relation to four major questions: 'just what is a "horror film"'; or what are the typical settings, characters, and narrative problems that structure and define this genre?'; 'what are the psychological functions of horror?'; 'how has this form evolved over

4 This was developed in a series of articles, many of which were republished in Robin Wood, *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan* (New York, NY: Columbia, 1986).

time, or, what does the history of the horror film tell us about both its relatively stable and constant aspects and of those that change historically?'; 'what are the social functions of horror?' (pp. 6–7). However, these questions assume that there is *something* called the horror film, rather than numerous historically contingent definitions of horror that are not necessarily commensurate, and it is precisely this kind of assumption that has been questioned by contemporary genre theory. Of course, the problem is not that Worland fails to conform to contemporary genre theory, but rather that he does not seem to engage with it, and that he writes as though his assumptions are obvious and incontestable. Even when it comes to theories of horror as a genre, the book seems largely to accept Robin Wood's account of the genre,<sup>4</sup> and provides little sense of the now numerous different attempts to theorize the genre that have appeared since Wood's classic writings on horror in the 1970s and early 1980s.

The second problem seems to be the organization of the book, which is strangely repetitive. After an introductory chapter, the book provides two chapters on the historical development of the horror film, before one on the social reception of horror. However, the book then proceeds to retell the history of the horror film through a series of chapters on individual films, the choice of which is predictable and canonical. It is only in the last two chapters that Worland begins to diverge from the established canon and offer something fresh. The first is a chapter on *Re-Animator* (Stuart Gordon, 1985), which provides a rare and therefore valuable engagement with horror comedy, whereas the second makes a serious attempt to tackle *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1992). As a result, these last two chapters do offer some interesting new work but it is difficult to see why the run through the individual films had not been integrated into the history provided earlier in the book.

If this seems like a fairly harsh appraisal of Worland, the main focus of attack is not its author but rather the genre of academic publishing within which it operates. Indeed, the major disappointment of the book is precisely that, although Worland has some very interesting things to say about the issues of social reception, these issues have been swamped by the narrative history of the development of the films (whether stylistic or thematic), which is often seen as one of only two options available to introductions to the genre.

The other option is the theoretical attempt to define the nature and character of the genre, and this is represented by Matt Hills's new book, *The Pleasure of Horror*, which takes on the key theories of horror but seems largely uninterested in the films, the conditions of their production or their reception. Of course his title does seem to suggest an interest in reception, but the book seems never quite to commit on a series of issues. In terms of reception, then, it rejects theory-centred issues of spectatorship, which attempt to identify theoretically the pleasures provided by the genre, but it also remains wary of audience studies. On the one hand, Hills condemns theoretical debates over the genre as



ultimately being ‘about why one theoretical approach is superior to another, with an openness or free-floating attention to the object of study coming a close second to a priori disciplinary attacks/defences’, but he also provides a ‘critique of asking the (fan) audience to account for its pleasures’ (p. 5).

Such a strategy seems typical of the book, as Hills repeatedly demonstrates his intelligence and skill through his theoretical critiques of others but rarely seems to be arguing for a position himself. Again and again one reads a complex coverage of a debate in which Hills takes on all comers but, each time, one is left uncertain as to what Hills has actually demonstrated, beyond his superiority to other critics.

He does, however, cover a good deal of ground. He provides a lengthy critique of cognitive approaches to the genre and addresses theories of the fantastic and of psychoanalysis. He also examines discourses of connoisseurship in horror fandom and its complex position in relation to censorship. However, it is his section on ‘para-sites’ that is the most telling, and here he examines those forms which lie on the borders of horror: forms such as television horror, depictions of real-life horror and even theory itself, which are commonly seen as Other to horror but, therefore, call into question its very identity. Again, however, Hills is unclear on where he stands. On the one hand, he tends to imply that others have excluded these forms and provides criticisms of these exclusions. On the other hand, he also seems to accept that these categories do fall outside the genre. In short, Hills provides a critique of specific debates, and of the positions taken within them, but there seems often to be a sleight of hand by which he never declares himself and assumes a position of mastery over the debate precisely by seeming to absent himself. In the process, the book can be seductive and fascinating but it is also frustrating and unsatisfying. It plays its theoretical games with skill, but these games do not seem to get one very far, and one is left wondering what, if anything, has actually been gained from the process of writing or reading.

There is a similar sense of frustration with the Conrich and Woods collection, *The Cinema of John Carpenter*, which is distinguished by being, rather amazingly, the first extensive study of this key director’s work. The book certainly contains some interesting articles, with Woods’s own chapter, ‘Us and them: authority and identity in Carpenter’s films’, being the best, a skilful and fascinating account of the constructions of identity within the films. In this case, there is a real attention to complexity and nuance but also to the feel of Carpenter’s films. However, much of the book is rather disappointing, largely because of its almost exclusive focus on the films themselves rather than broader questions of their production, exhibition or reception.

Furthermore, it remains trapped in a rather old, and now futile, debate about these films. Back in the 1970s and 1980s, Wood was highly critical of Carpenter, who was seen as the most problematic of the 1970s auteurs. Although he lavished praise on George Romero, Wes Craven and Tobe

Hooper, Wood remained suspicious of Carpenter. He not only attacked *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976) for portraying the street gangs as ‘baddies’ and the cops as ‘goodies’, but saw *Halloween* (1978) and its imitators as ‘rightwing horror’ that represented an attack on feminism and, by extension, leftwing movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Such claims have been challenged, but the collection becomes caught up with Wood’s agenda, or rather one central question within it – is Carpenter authoritarian or anti-authoritarian?

Furthermore, Wood’s original attack on Carpenter was based on a set of assumptions about genre. Carpenter is positioned as a long-haired hippie, a product of the 1960s, who explicitly rejected any interest in being a ‘political’ filmmaker. Wood’s argument was therefore not that the director was a Reaganite propagandist but rather that he was too in love with genre. While Romero, Craven and Hooper were all seen as subverting the horror genre, Carpenter was seen as insufficiently critical of the genre’s supposedly conservative politics. As a result, Wood attacked Carpenter on the grounds that the director’s films were celebrations of horror and of other genres, and that they were therefore unable to do anything but (unconsciously) reproduce the conservative ideologies that lay buried within these genres.

As a result, many of the essays are embroiled in a debate that is not only reductive but also rather repetitive. Furthermore, the debate is grounded in notions of genre that, at the very least, need to be argued for rather than simply accepted. In other words, Wood’s position on Carpenter is based on a notion of genre that has been seriously challenged over the past couple of decades, and the book (and the articles within it) needs at least to acknowledge this. Indeed, it is such an awareness that distinguishes the essays of Woods and Barry Keith Grant, which both find ways either to sidestep the problem or to face it head-on. Other standout essays are Sheldon Hall on Widescreen, and Burnand and Mera on Carpenter’s music, if only because, despite their limitations, these pieces begin to open up different kinds of questions.

If these three books represent some of the problems with current work on the horror genre, Peter Hutchings and Kevin Heffernan have written the two best books on the genre in a very long time. Hutchings provides a general introduction to the genre but avoids the three options listed above. Although he starts with a chapter on defining horror, his argument demonstrates the problems with attempts to define the genre theoretically, while also giving an account of the history that provides a sense of the canonical narrative without presenting that narrative as authoritative. Thus the reader is introduced to the ways in which the genre has usually been discussed, while being encouraged to think beyond those accounts.

The book then moves on to discuss a series of issues about horror spectatorship, audiences and questions of difference, all of which are fairly familiar, but it also raises questions of sound and performance in horror, questions almost never dealt with in the existing scholarship. The

book thus operates as an absolutely terrific introduction to the genre, which familiarizes the reader with the existing scholarship but also suggests a series of new directions. It is also one of those excellent introductions that will reward those familiar with the existing scholarship and enable them to think about established debates in new ways.

Heffernan, in contrast, provides a focused study of a specific period of the genre's history (1953–68), one that cuts across the common periodizations of the genre. Furthermore, it does not associate a history of horror with a narrative history of the thematic or stylistic development of the genre, but rather provides a detailed analysis of its industrial conditions. In the process, the book examines how the genre was involved in a series of developments in technology, distribution and exhibition, and it does so through a series of case studies of films such as *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (Jack Arnold, 1954), *Curse of Frankenstein* (Terence Fisher, 1957), *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960) and *Night of the Living Dead* (George Romero, 1968); production companies such as Hammer, AIP and Astor Pictures and processes such as the technological development of 3D, the increasing internationalization of horror production and the relation between film and television. As a result, it is so much more than an attempt to theorize what horror is, another version of the canonical history of the genre or yet more interpretations of the same group of films. Instead, the book not only offers a fresh account of the horror film, but also demonstrates the centrality of the genre to a series of key institutional shifts in the period.

If this review has spent rather longer on the problems of the earlier books than on the strengths of the two later volumes, this is for two reasons. First, these earlier books are symptomatic of problems within both scholarship and academic publishing, and second, these later books demand to be read rather than simply described. As I have argued, too many books on genre evoke a strong sense of *déjà vu*, and leave the reader wondering what new ground has been covered, but both Hutchings and Heffernan require and reward a close reading. They are simply the two best models that we currently have of how to think about horror, but also raise important questions about the study of film genre more generally.

**Tony Shaw, *British Cinema and the Cold War*. London: IB Tauris, 2006, 280 pp.**

**ROBERT MURPHY**

IB Tauris has finally deemed Tony Shaw's *British Cinema and the Cold War* fit for a wider readership five years after it came out in hardback. Fortunately, nothing has happened to make his study less useful or relevant. Apart from disappointingly murky stills, which look as if they have been deliberately drabbed down by some publishing apparatchik, this is a surprisingly approachable volume, written clearly and undogmatically, full of generous and perceptive analyses of (sometimes) unjustly forgotten films. *State Secret* (1950), for example, Sidney Gilliat's complex and intelligent thriller about a doctor who finds it is impossible to maintain his medical neutrality in a Central European country moving towards totalitarianism; the Boultings' *Seven Days to Noon* (1950), boldly extending sympathy to a disturbed scientist driven to terrorism and madness in his bid to block the road to nuclear Armageddon; and Carol Reed's *The Man Between* (1953), a flawed masterpiece set in Berlin before the wall went up.

Shaw covers his subject comprehensively. He diligently tracks down rare films set in Russia after the Bolshevik revolution – Maurice Sandground's *The Land of Tomorrow* (1919) and Harold Shaw's *The Land of Mystery* (1920) – and finds condemnations of socialism in Dinah Shurey's patriotic melodrama *The Last Post* (1929) and Randall Faye's low-budget comedies *Hyde Park* (1934) and *If I Were Rich* (1936). He explores the brief wartime honeymoon when the Red Army was the epitome of courage, the Russian people our staunch allies against Hitler, and Laurence Olivier starred as the Russian engineer Ivan Kouznetsoff in Anthony Asquith's *The Demi-Paradise* (1943). Shaw points out that this and other positive representations of Russians were an anomaly and that

British cinema was soon substituting communists for Nazis as the villains of low-budget espionage thrillers such as *Paul Temple's Triumph* (1950).

Not that Britain ever suffered the rabid anticommunism perpetrated by Senator McCarthy and the HUAC in the USA. Britain's mildly left-of-centre consensus never seemed threatened by an enemy within: the Communist Party of Great Britain, unlike its French and Italian counterparts, was a minor irritant rather than a serious political contender, and though the defection of Burgess, Maclean and eventually Philby was an embarrassment, they were leftovers from the 1930s rather than a fresh new danger. Indeed Britain was sufficiently secure to extend a (lukewarm) welcome to refugees from HUAC and allow them to work in the British film industry. Restrictions on their opportunities came less from the security services than from distributors wary of how credits for blacklisted writers and directors might damage a film's commercial prospects in the USA. Shaw concentrates on Joseph Losey, disinterring the anti-McCarthyite subtext of *The Intimate Stranger* (1955) and *Blind Date* (1959) and presenting *The Damned* (1961) as one of the few British films to attack government secrecy over nuclear issues and point to the danger this posed to British democracy and society.

Shaw's most scholarly chapter focuses on the film versions of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Rumours of CIA involvement have long been in circulation but Shaw provides concrete evidence, asserting that 'The origins of the animated feature-length film of *Animal Farm* lie within the American secret services' (p. 93), and meticulously charting the activities of the OPC (a spin-off of the CIA), the Psychological Warfare Workshop, and the (CIA-funded) British Society for Cultural Freedom in helping Louis de Rochement obtain the rights from Sonia Blair (who was enticed by the promise of a meeting with Clark Gable) and steering British-based animators John Halas and Joy Batchelor towards a message of simple-minded anticommunism. Halas and Batchelor proved to be unwilling stooges, and even with an upbeat ending the film retains its Orwellian satirical edge. Not so Michael Anderson's *1984*, which, despite hefty financial backing from the US Information Agency, was unenthusiastically received by film critics and performed poorly at the box office.

The Orwell adaptations are central to this study, but Shaw rounds up more than the usual suspects. He devotes a chapter to films about industrial relations, beginning with *Chance of a Lifetime* (1949), a mildly leftwing film which provoked Sir Godfrey Ince, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Labour, to splutter that 'This film can do nothing but harm to the cause of greater friendliness and understanding between management and labour' (p. 142). Ironically, the government, concerned at the way independent producers suffered at the hands of the Rank-ABPC duopoly, insisted that it be given a circuit release; it was the sullen exhibitors who did their best to bury it. Shaw is exceptionally good at filling in the political context around these films. *The Angry Silence* (1960), with its dumb shop steward and manipulative communist

agitator, is set against the scandal of communist infiltration in the Electrical Trades Union and concern over the spread of 'wildcat' strikes.

Another chapter is devoted to science fiction allegories, a disappointingly meagre bunch beyond the spin-offs from Nigel Kneale's BBC Television *Quatermass* serials. Shaw sandwiches them between films dealing with the possibility of nuclear explosion and those showing its likely consequences. This leads to fruitful juxtapositions – Stanley Kubrick's unique black comedy *Dr Strangelove* (1964) jostles against *The Mouse that Roared* (Jack Arnold, 1959), a lighter intervention into Cold War politics which also stars Peter Sellers in multiple roles. *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (1961), Val Guest's fanciful but intriguing Fleet Street epic about the likelihood of nuclear testing destroying the world, neatly complements Peter Watkins' grim television film *The War Game* (1965), allowed a limited theatrical release though considered too disturbing for the television audience until 1985. A chapter on 'Deviants and misfits' corrals together a diverse bunch of films ranging from Victor Saville's openly anticommunist *Conspirator* (1949) and Roy Boulting's equally hysterical *High Treason* (1950) to Robert Tronson's impressively realistic *Ring of Spies* (1963) and the witty adaptation of Len Deighton's *The Ipcress File* (Sidney Furie, 1965), with Michael Caine's agent's loyalties determined as much by the class war as the Cold War.

Each chapter offers nuggets of valuable information. 'And never the twain shall meet' concentrates on films showing (generally in the bleakest terms) conditions of life behind the Iron Curtain and contrasts them with Russian and East European films purporting to show 'the sunshine of socialism'. Peter Glenville's *The Prisoner* (1955) is paralleled with a discussion of the persecution and trial of Cardinal Mindszenty, the staunchly anticommunist Primate of Hungary on whom Alec Guinness's anonymous Cardinal is obviously based. *The Man Between* (Carol Reed, 1953) had to be shot on location in West Berlin because the communist authorities, particularly sensitive over the recent death of Stalin, were unhappy about the representations of Russians in Reed's *The Third Man* four years earlier. Shortly before the film was released, striking East Berlin construction workers 'sparked the first recognisable uprising against communist rule in Eastern Europe' (p. 74). Shaw interviews Stanley Forman and corresponds with Charles Cooper, two prominent leftwing film distributors, but inexplicably he only discusses the most propagandist communist imports, none of them later than *Moscow and Muscovites* in 1957. He mentions the Khrushchev thaw but ignores the films that took advantage of it to break with stifling orthodoxy and reach out to an international audience. Mikhail Kalatozov's *The Cranes are Flying* won the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 1958; Andrzej Wajda's trilogy *A Generation* (1954), *Kanal* (1957) and *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958), along with the two parts of Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* (1944, 1958) and Polanski's *Knife in the Water* (1962), reached beyond leftwing circles to the wider audience of the film society

movement, whose members even Senator McCarthy would not have mistaken for communists. All these films – precursors of a wave of fresh, innovative cinema from Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in the mid 1960s – were shown on television in the early 1960s and, although certainly not fostering communism, were hugely influential in shedding light on life behind the Iron Curtain.

As the Cold War period recedes into history, it comes to seem increasingly bizarre. The basic unreality of a world divided between capitalism and communism was only possible to sustain, while the populations of the two halves were kept in ignorance of each other. One might expect cinema to play an essential role in perpetuating myths and propagating falsehoods, but it could also question and illuminate. Shaw insists that although the crude Red-baiting of Hollywood films like *I Was a Communist for the FBI* (Gordon Douglas, 1951) had few British equivalents, the substantial number of films that did deal with Cold War themes must have had some impact on the British cinemagoers ‘feeding suspicions and helping to produce what we can now judge to be an exaggerated fear among the public of an enemy within’ (p. 62). He argues his case well, but there is a distinct bias.

The thoroughness and integrity of Shaw’s research guarantee that he allows space for – indeed in the case of *Dr Strangelove*, *The Damned* and several other films enthusiastically endorses – the growing number of films that dispute the Cold War line. But he nonetheless downplays their influence. The Carol Reed/Graham Greene collaboration *Our Man in Havana* (1959), which makes fun of Cold War politics and was shot in Cuba with the approval of the Castro government, was ‘only a modest commercial success’ (p. 177), so presumably had little influence on public opinion; but the considerably less successful *1984* – despite its ‘generally poor quality and low-budget appearance’ – ‘was still of some value to Western propagandists’ (p. 113). *The Ipcress File* ‘suggested that the Cold War fight against the enemy within had become a complex drudge’ (p. 62), but like the even more cynical adaptation of John Le Carré’s *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (Martin Ritt, 1965), it is folded into the conformist mainstream because, though critical of the management of the secret services, it does not question the need for their continued existence.

With exemplary Cold War rigidity, Shaw refuses to see the writing on the wall. He feeds off outdated myths about the 1950s, refusing to acknowledge the seething discontents beneath their placid surface, and he makes little attempt to come to terms with the ‘cultural revolution’ of the 1960s. He fails to realize that a Cinematograph Exhibitors Association appeal to make ‘films of family entertainment value’ in 1960 fell on deaf ears (British cinema of the 1960s can be accused of all sorts of vices, but a concentration on family values is not one of them). And his discussion of British New Wave films reworks John Hill’s pessimistic Marxist conclusions from *Sex, Class and Realism*<sup>1</sup> to support his thesis that there was no real challenge to conservative orthodoxy.

<sup>1</sup> John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956–1963* (London: British Film Institute, 1986).



Part of the problem is that by stopping abruptly in 1965 Shaw is able to shut his eyes to what happened in the late 1960s when all hell broke loose and, for young people at least, the Cold War became a meaningless concept. It does not say much for the effectiveness of twenty years of Cold War propaganda that Prime Minister Harold Wilson felt unable to send troops to support the Americans fighting what they considered a pivotal war against communism in South East Asia. Even without direct British involvement, massive demonstrations were held in London and the Trotskyist groups that led them were as contemptuous of Soviet style communism as they were of western imperialism. Things did change rapidly between 1965 and 1968, but even so it is difficult to square such anti-establishment radicalism with the picture Shaw draws of a sheep-like populace moulded into docile conformity by subtle government propaganda. Shaw's book is an invaluable guide to a previously ignored and extremely interesting area of British cinema, but now that our own supposedly more sceptical and media-savvy society has allowed itself to be drawn into a disastrous war on the basis of evidence so amateurishly fabricated as to make a KGB agent blush, the conclusions he draws look unsustainably smug.

**Phil Powrie and Robynn Stilwell, *Changing Tunes: the Use of Pre-existing Music in Film*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006, 205 pp.**

**Ian Conrich and Estella Tincknell, *Film's Musical Moments*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006, 226 pp.**

**Miguel Mera and David Burnand, *European Film Music*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006, 206 pp.**

## STAN LINK

'... it turns out that it was sound, not pictures, that made shocking television'. Writing for the *New York Times* on 2 January 2007, Alessandra Stanley described how 'the background noise in a camera-cellphone recording of Saddam Hussein's execution – jostling and sectarian insults – belied the Iraqi government's portrait of the hasty hanging as a cool, considered meting of justice'. Perhaps the event's morbid gravity accelerated the sense of sudden discovery, but media interest surrounding silent vs sound versions of the hanging video simply foregrounded an overvaluation of visuality and underestimation of audibility common not only to media culture but perhaps also to our recollection of personal experiences. Silent images of the execution were freely distributed, making a later arrest for the unofficial video seem like a penalty for stealing a secret sound – a punishment indicating that, while images are usually the common currency, hearing had acquired a real worth to be coveted. The grotesque epiphany of an alternately silent and noisy snuff film suddenly exposes sound's potential existential and political intensity: 'being there' and 'taking sides'. Under more usual circumstances, however, audition is still loaded symbolically and emotionally, even if it is far more complex and subtle. For some of us whose primary concern is understanding and creating auditory culture and experiences, the soundtrack offers more than a better understanding of film *qua* film. Cinema becomes a laboratory for probing hearing's

place in culture, society and individual lives. Soundtrack studies grow useful not simply in engaging media, but also in mapping audition onto the landscapes of mundane experience: personal and social politics, identity, difference, sexuality and affect.

Roaming a wide range of such perspectives, these three books are welcome voices in the conversation about listening. In presenting the work of some forty different authors, a crop of edited volumes can itself be an encouraging sign of growth even when successful results are naturally somewhat sporadic. Each of these volumes has a distinct character: *Changing Tunes: the Use of Pre-existing Music in Film* comes to terms with the manifold implications of a staple cinematic practice; *Film's Musical Moments* envisages a concept bearing the features of genre and experience; *European Film Music* plots points on the curve of a larger-scale argument. Each contains a large amount of imaginative, relevant and penetrating scholarship, though what they achieve as collections in illuminating their respective subject matter varies considerably.

For reasons ranging from quality of content to editorial execution, the strongest of these is Powrie and Stilwell's *Changing Tunes*. The volume's bipartite grouping of classical and popular music is deceptive, as its strength derives more from cinematic function than from the sort of music used. Mike Cormack's essay 'The pleasures of ambiguity: using classical music in film' leaves the classical-vs-pop dichotomy firmly in place, but then mostly as a way of theorizing pre-existing music as a whole. As an overview, Cormack's essay would work well as a second introduction, but opening with Claudia Gorbman's essay on *Eyes Wide Shut* is tactically obvious. Kubrick's signature deployment of pre-existing music constitutes an unofficial gold standard for creative non-originality, and Gorbman's lead becomes strategically important as she efficiently differentiates between Kubrick's choices to the point where 'each musical type functions differently in the filmic operations of point of view, affect, and narrative commentary' (p. 7). More significantly, however, she places the film's classical and popular borrowings in relation to each other, further synthesizing a dichotomy already suspect *outside* cinema but by now almost wholly unsustainable within it. Ultimately, Gorbman inverts the status of genres, at one point noting how occasionally 'classical excerpts function much like popular songs' (p. 17).

Following on from this, the most useful aspect of the volume becomes its diffraction of non-original music into various modalities of pre-existence. We might be inclined to conceive of musical pre-existence in the form of specific cues or quotations. Indeed, the potential of reapplying individual musical works receives thoughtful contextual analysis in Jeongwon Joe's examination of *Amadeus* and a wide-ranging comparative analysis in Kristi Brown's essay on three uses of Edvard Grieg's *In the Hall of the Mountain King*. But perhaps, the most evocative work on musical reuse is in 'Queer pleasures: the Bolero, camp

and Almadóvar', in which Vanessa Knights argues that 'the repetitive camp performances of the same musical number highlight how gender identity is itself performed through repeated actions' (p. 103). Given that familiarity and repetition abide within pre-existing music, explicitly connecting non-originality with individual identity is suggestive of both the cinematic and personal powers articulated by reuse.

Several essays also convincingly explore pre-existence beyond the sounding of particular pieces. In chapters by Lars Franke and Ann Davies, opera as genre becomes the primary consideration, whereas Ronald Rodman's consideration of popular music genres as *leitmotivic* elements renegotiates the status and functions of pop vs classical. Phil Powrie's 'The fabulous destiny of the accordion in French Cinema' makes performer and instrument the locus of pre-existence, and Robynn Stilwell's 'Vinyl communion: the record as ritual object in girls' rites-of-passage films' concerns the role of physical media as a 'ritual object'. Finally, Timothy Warner's 'Narrating sound: the pop video in the age of the sampler' constitutes a necessary excursion into more contemporary media and technological practice. But it also draws peripheral attention to the book's noticeable lack – television. The inexhaustible supply of pre-existing music in cinema perhaps explains this failure to 'take on' television, and yet the rich areas of congruence and divergence seem to call for some more explicit attention. Apart from this, the success of this volume is attributable in part to its breadth of considerations; each essay is a thoughtful account complementing the others and, usefully, virtually every essay models a different approach that might be reapplied to wholly different material. *Changing Tunes* is thus both self-contained and suggestive, giving it a sense of vitality and permanency.

Though far more stimulating conceptually, Conrich and Tincknell's *Film's Musical Moments* falls somewhat shy in terms of cohesion. Brimming with implications, the volume's achievement is nevertheless diluted by a centrifugal eclecticism. The editors describe *Film's Musical Moments* as 'about musical performance on film, about the use of music within film and . . . about film musicals: a triple focus' (p. 1). 'The use of music within film' as a concentration? The result of aligning such amorphous lenses is less trifocal than akin to wearing three different pairs of glasses at once: blurry. The many strengths of this volume in fact arise from a single impulse – 'musical performance beyond the musical' (p. 4). In characterizing the meaning of Celine Dion's My Heart Will Go On in *Titanic*, Conrich and Tincknell point out that 'the foregrounded presence of musical numbers in non-musical films has become a way of articulating emotions, desires, even fears that exceed narrative motivation' (p. 6). Those last three words are the book's linchpin (and should have served as mantra). With such excesses as key, the idea of the 'musical moment' takes shape in simultaneously considering 'musical' as both noun and adjective, and materializes fully as music aspires to 'break narrative continuity', 'produce textual disruption', become

‘self-consciously non-realist’, or serve in ‘texts that seek to reconcile music with experience’ (p. 5).

As the musical is already characterized by excess, the abrupt and transitory ‘musical moment’ in other contexts often articulates the surprising effects of performance more distinctively. *Film’s Musical Moments* is most fully concentrated when filtered, that is, when not dealing with the musical genre *per se*. Contrasting the ‘musical moments’ in the post-classical teen film with the nominal performances in musicals, Scott Henderson’s ‘Youth, excess and the musical moment’ notes how ‘the wider effect of these musical moments functions to create resistance – as opposed to the integration of the classical musicals’ (p. 153). Henderson describes a scene in *10 Things I Hate About You* (Gil Junger, 1999) as ‘a nod towards the function of such performances in the classical Hollywood musical, but its unexpectedness, elaborateness, and the absurdity and excessiveness of the performance combined with the choice of the musical style negate any possibility for the moment to become fully contained by the narrative’ (p. 152). This reads as a defining statement, mooring the ‘musical moment’ in the wake of ephemeral spectatorial and narrative encounters with music.

*Film’s Musical Moments* hits its mark in about half of its fifteen chapters. Henderson’s essay and Tincknell’s ‘The soundtrack movie, nostalgia and consumption’ form the central artery of the volume, from and to which its other vital points flow (or don’t). Ulrike Sieglöhr’s ‘The operatic in New German Cinema’ and Bruce Babington’s ‘Star personae and authenticity in the country music biopic’ work surprisingly well in tandem to describe the relationship between music genres and excess. ‘Music, film and post-Stonewall gay identity’, by Gregory Woods and Tim Franks, delivers on the premiss of reconciling ‘music with experience’ (p. 5). Also along these lines, Jonathan Rayner’s ‘Stardom, reception and the ABBA musical’ persuasively extends the ‘musical moment’ into ‘the cultural formation of identity from the personal to the national scale’ (p. 100). In that sense, especially Woods, Franks and Rayner represent the volume’s overall strength while putting its weaknesses into perspective; *Film’s Musical Moments* seems most effective when playing to the ways in which larger issues flow from personal musical encounters along a circuit that returns their meaning to the scale of narratives and spectator experience. In its highball of screening context, spectator participation, absurdity and ‘the pleasure gained from revisiting and re-experiencing a known text’ (p. 115), Ian Conrich’s chapter, ‘Musical performance and the cult film experience’ plumbs the volume’s shortest distance between in-front-of-the-screen gratification and indulgent onscreen performance. On the other hand, those chapters emphasizing historical information and studies of musical genres proper, though well done on their own terms, seem comparatively cumbersome ways of conveying the dynamic and experiential immediacy of musical moments.

1 Milan Kundera, 'Die Weltliteratur: how we read one another', *The New Yorker*, 8 January 2007, p. 28.

If *Film's Musical Moments* demonstrates that collections may be efficient ways of making books but inefficient ways of unpacking concepts, Mera and Burnand's *European Film Music* seems bound only by the glue on its spine. For although most of the essays are individually as strong as those of the two volumes considered above, they lack enough attraction one to another or towards a useful nexus, and thus fail to turn the collection's pretext into context. Perhaps, in one sense, this is simply how it should be. In formulating his ideal of Europe as 'maximum diversity in minimum space', Milan Kundera wrote recently for *The New Yorker* that 'all the nations of Europe are living out a common destiny, but each is living it out differently'. Kundera quickly goes on to identify the most pressing questions in understanding what 'European' might mean. 'The history of each European art (painting, the novel, music, and so on)', he claims, 'seems like a relay race in which the various nations pass the baton from one to the next'.<sup>1</sup> Kundera contemplates how 'European' can signify both identity and difference not simply on a national level but on a supranational scale. But beyond an editorial introduction that cogently describes those challenges among many others, *European Film Music* does not position itself very well to pursue its ambition across the borders of any one country.

As might be expected, *European Film Music* contains several essays on national subjects, most notably German (Reimar Volker), Italian (Richard Dyer), Spanish (Kathleen M. Vernon and Cliff Eisen), British (Kate Daubney), French (Phil Powrie) and Irish (David Cooper). Each of these quite convincingly portrays such elements as musical style, scoring practices or sound design against a national backdrop painted mostly in historical tints. These essays are very worthwhile on their own, and perhaps this should be sufficient. But something still seems to be lacking. Though they may be appetizing ingredients, a mixture of nation-oriented topics, however extensive, cannot leaven into non-trivial concepts of 'European' – ones beyond the tautology of 'from a nation in Europe'. Such studies face their subjects inward, making them products of a time and place that is anything but supranational. A case for common identity may have proven elusive anyway. Strangely resigned to this, but perhaps reasonably so given the myriad difficulties, Mera and Burnand suggest that 'latching onto an all-encompassing concept of European cinema is virtually impossible' (p. 3). The difficulty here, however, is not simply that a basis for a cosmopolitan European identity may never unfold from its preponderance of national or case evidence, but rather that the fascinating problematic itself of European identity very quickly vanishes in this collection. Individual nation concepts weigh so strongly here that even by including non-European cinemas it would scarcely have altered the volume's overall impression, scale or accomplishment, especially in its goal of counterbalancing the centrality of Hollywood in film music discourse.

Most of *European Film Music*'s work on a supranational reading is done by Janet K. Halfyard's 'Screen playing: cinematic representations

of classical music performance and European identity'. This piece is absolutely vital to the volume being more than an accumulation of isolated concepts and instances. For although one of Halfyard's guiding themes is the gender and status of fictional classical music performers, her study reaches a much deeper vein. She notes that 'one of the most striking differences between Hollywood and European films is that when Hollywood films cast American characters as classical musicians, we very rarely see them play classical music at all, as if resisting it at some level' (p. 74). Halfyard's observations justly highlight Hollywood's characteristic suspicion of high culture while simultaneously distinguishing European cinema's commitment to art.

When mired in the threadbare dualities of art vs entertainment, high vs popular culture, the line connecting Hollywood's reticence and its ostensible identity is quite clear. But while the complementary belief in art's redemptive power forms a flying buttress of European cinema, so too does its conviction open onto an equally characteristic weakness. Halfyard's essay charts the cinematic front edge of this vulnerability when noting that in European films 'even when the musician is unsympathetic, performance seems to be exempt from this characterization' (p. 77). 'In *L'Accompagnatrice*, set during World War II', she writes, 'Irene is both self-centered and self-deluding, refusing to admit that she is ethically compromised by performing to German audiences in occupied Paris. It would be easy for Irene to be represented as an unsympathetic character but, again, there is no clear condemnation of her evident in the film's direction' (p. 78). High culture engenders not only a formative subject, but also a characteristic blindspot. Halfyard's study hints that it may be in the interplay between redemption through art and its hubris that something like a 'European' identity emerges.

The setting of *L'Accompagnatrice* is largely incidental to Halfyard's bigger point, and the more significant historical and cultural implications of that relationship between high culture and misplaced belief are not explored beyond cinema. More importantly for the volume, however, is that Halfyard's observations focus on representation and performance, carrying an implicit 'to whom?'. The question of what constitutes 'European film music' is at least partially framed in the position of its reception. How do Europe, Hollywood and others *read* 'Europe' and 'Hollywood'? This is no small matter for this volume, for it becomes clear through most of its other essays, both in content and in methodology, that the internationalization of music, technological means, production, capital and so on offer few unambiguous material clues to an elemental 'European' situation. Perhaps the spirit of European difference and identity is merely a phantasm, the desire for which in fact acknowledges its non-existence or death. However, by locating 'European film music' not merely in how it *sounds*, but also in how it is performed and, especially, *heard*, a shared identity and difference does not need to 'exist' as much as emboss its possibility on interpretive and creative acts. The implications of Halfyard's essay can therefore



contextualize some of the other work of *European Film Music*, but cannot provide enough direction to its many components travelling alone.

Finally, however, the ways in which these three books speak to each other is worth noting. There are many explicit, illuminating overlaps in subject matter, and they are considerably stronger as a set than as individual studies. We have not yet reached a point where considerations of the soundtrack have become factionalized, though we have clearly reached critical mass when sound and music are understood to have their own momentum and their own story to tell. Perhaps, this is the story authorized by the image and narrative, but it is just as evident that the character of sound and music is often more radical – unframed and refusing, of course, to keep silent.

**Jonathan Bignell and Sarah Cardwell (general eds), *The Television Series*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004—**

**Jonathan Bignell and Andrew O'Day, *Terry Nation*. 2004, 230 pp.**

**Simon Morgan-Russell, *Jimmy Perry and David Croft*. 2004, 179 pp.**

**Dave Rolinson, *Alan Clarke*. 2005, 197 pp.**

**Sarah Cardwell, *Andrew Davies*. 2005, 227 pp.**

**Julia Hallam, *Lynda La Plante*. 2005, 166 pp.**

## ROBIN NELSON

Who is responsible for – who has authority over – a television series? This is just one key question which Jonathan Bignell's and Sarah Cardwell's *The Television Series* sets out to address. Following a period in which the death of the author has been much vaunted, this new series tackles head-on the issue of authorial contribution, not only of writers, historically privileged in television, but also of other production personnel. Each book is fluently and directly written, unpacking concepts with clarity and illustrating them with analysis of programme extracts. Most include small black-and-white photographs to illustrate points under discussion.

The volumes typically follow a chronology tracing their subject's career development in the television industry (and briefly beyond, where the practitioners have worked in other media). Full details of the subject's television output are listed at the end of each book along with substantial bibliographies referencing works in the chosen conceptual framework besides source material on the subject. For example, Simon Morgan-Russell references a number of key works on sitcom in his bibliography as well as books and essays on English class hierarchies, which are a core concern, as demonstrated in Perry and Croft's writing. Primary sources include interviews with the subjects (where this is still possible) and archive material. With the exception of *Alan Clarke*, the

volumes reviewed here feature writers (or writer/producers and writer/script editors), but Dave Rolinson's analysis of Clarke's career makes a strong case for the possibility of a distinct form of directorial auteurism in television. Indeed, each volume contributing to *The Television Series* sets out to provide 'an authoritative guide to a practitioner's body of work, and assesses his or her contribution to television over the years' (General editors' preface). Forthcoming volumes in the series will include Lez Cooke on Troy Kennedy Martin and Stephen Lacey on Tony Garnett.

Thus, somewhat unfashionably – and consciously declaring a shift in approach – *The Television Series* identifies and celebrates the distinctive contribution to the medium of significant individuals. Selection for inclusion is in itself a mark of esteem, and fulfils a secondary function of the series, namely to recall – and rediscover through in-depth research – a range of 'artistic and cultural achievements [which] remain relatively unacknowledged' (General editors' preface). Part of Bignell and Cardwell's strategy in *The Television Series* is to anchor Television Studies as a discipline by foregrounding and valorizing special contributors, and even their *oeuvres*. For though Cultural Studies has been open to the forms of popular culture, Film and Theatre Studies have remained somewhat aloof in respect of fictions for the small screen. Avoiding an overt assertion of 'television as art', *The Television Series* does declare, and illustrate, that television's cultural forms are worthy objects of study and their makers deserving of credit, at least as influential members of creative teams.

Though many television practitioners regard themselves primarily as 'craftsmen' in a collaborative process (on Terry Nation, for example, see Bignell and O'Day, p. 10), the volumes here suggest that the distinctive contribution of individuals might amount to a signature, an individual voice or even artistry. This is a more conscious ambition for some practitioners than others. In Rolinson's account, Clarke's distinction simply emerges through him 'repeatedly giv[ing] a voice to these figures who have been exiled from societies whose worst features they embody' (p. 41). To some extent, however, the narratives of each volume echo one other in recounting the attempt by determined and creative people to gain more control over the outcomes of their endeavours in a struggle for authority. Andrew Davies, often working with the 'classic' material of other writers, seeks to leave his imprint on his adaptations. As Cardwell states: 'the more famous Davies becomes, the more choice he has about which projects to do and the more say in how they are executed' (p. 115). Likewise, Perry and Croft finally get resources to move beyond sitcom with *You Rang, M'Lord*, extending to a 'dramatic component . . . [with] a notable increase in production values' (p. 134) to which, one suspects, they had always aspired. In writing the format and storylines for *Blake's 7*, Terry Nation was 'aiming to gain greater control over, and credit for, his work, with more author(ity) status' (p. 40). Lynda La Plante initially turned from acting to writing to address the lack of good roles for women

in television and she subsequently formed her own company to realize her scripts. Julia Hallam forcibly makes the case that in the early 1980s all-women production teams were needed to avoid men imposing another set of values on to a female-authored script:

Dialogue and scenes termed ‘unfeminine’ were softened; if scripts were left intact, music and lighting were used to romanticise and ‘rose-tint’ scenes intended to be harrowing and stark (p. 30).

The factors inhibiting artistry and auteurism in television are, however, recognized to be many and various. Generic constraints are shown either to be stifling or to be overcome in the negotiations which inform the inevitably collaborative and compromising process of production. The previously broadly-held perception that the television medium cannot afford quality visuals led to a historic emphasis on a theatre- or radio-derived dialogue, and hence privileged the writer. Industrially, the producer and director’s roles were perceived to serve the writer’s intentions. Rolinson notes that the television director’s role in the ‘studio system’ was conceived as being one of ‘transferring someone else’s work faithfully and self-effacingly’ (p. 10) to the small screen. As Hallam’s analysis points out, however, this was by no means a neutral process but informed by (patriarchal) habits, the producer and director ineluctably shaping the final outcome. Indeed, Bignell and O’Day remark that ‘[t]elevision can be regarded as a producer’s medium, meaning that the television producer has the predominant authority over, and responsibility for, programmes’ (p. 35). Their account of Nation’s career evidences how the choice of personnel and the allocation of budget impacts upon the realization of a writer’s script.

The powerplay between the various contributors makes it difficult at times to attribute credit with any certainty, affording a degree of slippage in some of the arguments of the series. In their enthusiasm for their subjects, the contributors occasionally give them credit while the extent of contributions by the director, actors, designers or cinematographers is not apparent. In Cardwell’s case for the distinctive voice of Davies, for example, if the outcome is laudable Davies gets the plaudits but if it is perceived to be flawed other factors take the blame. In respect of his adaptation of *Wives and Daughters*, for example, it is claimed that Davies is able ‘to challenge and expand literary canonicity’ (p. 139), effectively conferring classic status upon Elizabeth Gaskell’s novel. However, a lack of flair in the final televisual product is put down to the director as, in Davies’s own view, ‘it was done in a very stately way’ (p. 140). In this context, a closer comparison of a writer’s final drafts with shooting scripts, where available, as well as the transmitted text, might have been illuminating.

Although value judgements are made in all the volumes, a strength of *The Television Series* in relativist times is that worth is not assumed or judged against absolute criteria of art or cultural value but rather ‘each book makes a case for the importance of the work considered therein’

(General editors' preface). Cardwell, in particular, is strong in articulating the purpose of critical practice as demonstrated in the series. She argues that:

A valid interpretation displays sensitivity to a work's 'formal context', attributing to it reasonable or probable meanings, given the creator's awareness of this formal context and of how the audience is likely to respond. (p. 26)

Ultimately, she acknowledges that her 'own individual predilections and notions of value have come dangerously close to undermining the ideal stance of 'sympathetic disinterest' (p. 186). But the volumes under consideration here bear out the value in Television Studies of detailed critical analysis located in a selected conceptual framework and undertaken by people who validate their passions and interests with a thorough knowledge of their subjects.

The critical approach taken is not monolithic across the series since each contributor writes from 'a particular critical or theoretical perspective' (General editors' preface). Indeed, contributors each overtly articulate their conceptual framework and, in some instances, are explicitly self-reflective on the informing values of their critical stance. Moreover, the different stances are conflicting, not to the point of flat contradiction but rather to the illumination of the core issues. For example, Cardwell attempts to trace an authorial signature across Davies's varied output, much of which is adaptation, whereas Bignell and O'Day frame, and thus qualify, Nation's authorial distinction and control by setting his writing in the context of the many production personnel (producers, script editors, directors, designers and so on). Thus, the individual books in the series, besides being informed and insightful on their specific subjects, are in dialogue with each other over the different ways of assessing the individual's contribution to any television programme. This refreshing, overall approach allows due credit to be given to exceptional, creative individuals while fully recognizing that broadcast television production is a complex and collaborative industrial process over which no one individual can have total control.

One strength of *The Television Series* is the detailed analysis of scenes or selective episodes of programmes. Rolinson's insightful account of Clarke's direction of *To Encourage the Others* demonstrates the difference made by a creative directorial imagination. The (re)construction of the celebrated 1952 case of the shooting of a police officer which led to the hanging of nineteen-year-old Derek Bentley, rested crucially on the interpretation of his alleged utterance, 'let him have it'. Rolinson shows how one cut shaped the television treatment and the drama-documentary's argument:

As the jury are counselled that Craig and Bentley should be tried 'on the evidence alone', Clarke cuts to the Bentley family waiting outside. They have Derek's coat which could provide evidence ... but which

will not be produced in court. The cumulative effect is to draw attention to the essential limits of the discourse: the things the jury do not see. (p. 40)

The analysis of the 'near silent, seventeen-shot sequence' (p. 43) of the hanging itself bears out Rolinson's claim that *To Encourage the Others* 'disproves the suggestion that multi-camera tape recording leads to anonymous direction' (p. 38).

Cardwell's *Andrew Davies* offers exemplary, detailed analysis of a television text to bring out its specificities. Her account of *Vanity Fair* made me want to watch the serial again, and her shot-by-shot analysis of sequences in *The Signalman* set up the book's insightful relation of the process of adaptation from literature to the visual (as well as verbal-aural and sonic) medium of television. Furthermore, Cardwell's account sustains a significant differentiation between television and film at a moment when many commentators are talking up the cinematic aspects of contemporary product. In recounting Davies's approach to the adaptation of *Dr Zhivago*, she demonstrates his, and her own, awareness that each medium has different strengths even though the marked boundary between them is becoming blurred.

Morgan-Russell's accounts of extracts from *Dad's Army*, *It Ain't Half Hot, Mum*, *Hi-de-Hi* and *You Rang, M'Lord* reveal a preoccupation with class as a feature of Perry's upbringing in particular and of postwar British culture (despite a supposed egalitarian impetus) more generally, and of established comic forms. He concludes, for example, that 'the 'inside' of *Dad's Army*'s structure was defined by the lower-middle-class British amateur' (p. 87) and posits that the earlier collaborations of Perry and Croft construct a 'normative identity, the "us" of mass audience spectatorship . . . [as] the lower- or middle-class, unathletic, and sexually apathetic man, itself another stereotype of British male sexuality' (p. 87). By locating the programmes in the historical context of their first reception, he is able to afford insights into such matters as alleged racism (blackface as well as scripted insults) and homophobia in *It Ain't Half Hot, Mum*.

Hallam's detailed analysis of *Widows* combines an understanding of techniques with aspects of performance:

Limitations on an actor's movements and what can be conveyed depend, initially, on who or what is in focus, and the framing of the body in space reinforces paralinguistic features of performance, such as gestures, body movement and the look. (pp. 46–7)

Though she credits La Plante with a range of innovations and a distinctive voice, Hallam fully acknowledges how many people need to be working to the same end for radical interventions to be made in the medium of television. Locating production insights in the context of genre and gender politics makes ultimately for a very rich and complex

overall analysis. Continuing her account of *Widows*, Hallam observes that:

[u]nusually for the crime series, the women are not the objects of a sexual gaze; male interest in the widows is motivated by a suspicion of their duplicity rather than their sexual desirability. (p. 50)

She thus demonstrates how aesthetics can be deployed to refunction a politics even in the reworking of a popular television genre.

As part of their account of *Nation*, Bignell and O'Day also show how genre might afford licence as well as acting as a constraint since 'authorship is carved out intertextually, in relation to the genres of other works' (p. 67). They point out that fans of science fiction on television are known to be both knowledgeable and attentive viewers. Thus they can argue with some conviction that '*Doctor Who*'s genre is intertextual, relying on similarities with, and differences from a history of television programmes, films, and literary works' (p. 71). They reveal a tension between the need to satisfy generic expectations and a space for intertextual play which a creative imagination such as *Nation*'s can exploit. In conceiving *Blake's 7*, for example, *Nation* thought in terms of '*The Dirty Dozen* in space' (p. 32). Indeed, Bignell and O'Day argue that *Nation*'s personal disposition to a mix of action adventure and science fiction shaped *Doctor Who*, diverting it from its initial trajectory. As they relate, 'the success of "The Daleks" overshadowed Newman's and Wilson's intentions for the educational aims of *Doctor Who*' (p. 52).

Each of these volumes makes a significant contribution to television studies scholarship, and collectively *The Television Series* mobilizes a dialogue between different perspectives and critical approaches. In boldly celebrating the achievements of individuals, the accounts of careers also illustrate the collaborative process of television production and the powerplays and tensions involved in trying to articulate a distinctive vision. Above all, the high quality of the textual analysis and contextual research does a service to Television Studies in showing what might be done when small-screen output is taken seriously. The writers do not need to assert the value they find in the *oeuvres* of the practitioners they discuss since they make it palpable, offsetting their own inevitable passions and interests with clear argument based in sound and wide-ranging research. The five books reviewed here establish the credentials of the series and make this reader at least look forward to forthcoming and future contributions.



## Notes to Contributors

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Notes and references, which should be kept to a minimum, should be on an automatic numbering system where possible, and appear at the end of the article, not at the foot of individual pages.

Style for citations of *written sources* is as follows:

1. Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: the Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Celia Britton. Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti (London: Macmillan, 1982).
2. Ginette Vincendeau, 'Melodramatic realism: on some French women's films in the 1930s', *Screen*, vol. 30, no. 3 (1989), pp. 51–65.
3. Monika Treut, 'Female misbehaviour', in Laura Pietrapaolo and Ada Testaferri (eds), *Feminisms in the Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 106–21.

References to *films* in both notes and main text should include full title with initial capitalisation according to accepted style of the language concerned. Titles should be italicised, and in the case of non-English language films original release title should precede US and/or British release title, followed by director and release date in round brackets:

*A bout de souffle/Breathless* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960)

Where such information is relevant to the argument and does not appear elsewhere in the text, details of production company and/or country of origin may also be included:

*The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks, Warner Bros, US, 1945)

References to *television programmes* should be dated from the year of first transmission, and, in the case of long-running serials, the duration of the run should be indicated. Details of production company, transmitting channel, country, may be supplied where they are relevant to the argument:

*Coronation Street* (Granada, 1961– )

Where writers or producers are credited their role should be indicated:

*Where the Difference Begins* (w. David Mercer, BBC, 1961).

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